

## CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> .....	I
<i>Chapter I.</i> Earliest Days .....	5
<i>Chapter II.</i> The Child King .....	34
<i>Chapter III.</i> Adolescence and Marriage .....	67
<i>Chapter IV.</i> Initiation as a Politician and the Awakening of his Passions .....	99
<i>Chapter V.</i> The Sovereign's Domestic Life and Family Joys. The Reign of Madame de Mailly	120
<i>Chapter VI.</i> Mmes Vintimille and De Château- roux, Cardinal Fleury's Last Years and Louis' Illness at Metz .....	155
<i>Chapter VII.</i> Glory and Love .....	188
<i>Chapter VIII.</i> Diplomatic Events and the King's Secret .....	220
<i>Chapter IX.</i> Louis XV and the Marquise de Pom- padour. Various Festivities .....	243
<i>Chapter X.</i> Damiens' Attack. The Parc-Aux-Cerfs	

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# LOUIS XV

*by*  
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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

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LONDON W.C. 2  
MASSIE PUBLISHING CO. LTD.

1 9 3 9



Private Collection

*Hyacinthe Rigaud: Louis XV as a Child*



# CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> .....	I
<i>Chapter I. Earliest Days</i> .....	5
<i>Chapter II. The Child King</i> .....	34
<i>Chapter III. Adolescence and Marriage</i> .....	67
<i>Chapter IV. Initiation as a Politician and the Awakening of his Passions</i> .....	99
<i>Chapter V. The Sovereign's Domestic Life and Family Joys. The Reign of Madame de Mailly</i>	120
<i>Chapter VI. Mmes Vintimille and De Château- roux, Cardinal Fleury's Last Years and Louis' Illness at Metz</i> .....	155
<i>Chapter VII. Glory and Love</i> .....	188
<i>Chapter VIII. Diplomatic Events and the King's Secret</i> .....	220
<i>Chapter IX. Louis XV and the Marquise de Pom- padour. Various Festivities</i> .....	243
<i>Chapter X. Damiens' Attack. The Parc-Aux-Cerfs and the Little Mistress</i> .....	279
<i>Chapter XI. The Subversion of Alliances and the Seven Year's War. Great Economic, Financial, Military and Social Reforms. Louis XV's Per- sonal Part</i> .....	301
<i>Chapter XII. Sadness and Bereavement, Madame du Barry, the Death of the King</i> .....	327

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## INTRODUCTION

THE sun flooding the halls of the Wallace Collection on a fine June morning lent an air of radiant youth to the works of art there; — youth, an exquisite image of which had just been before us in the beautiful foliage and rich grassy carpets of Hyde Park, and its vistas that Robert and Constable would have loved. Turning from the admiration of nature in this gay mood, I found the same festive air inside the museum where so many gems of XVIII<sup>th</sup> century French art are reunited. The pastoral scenes of Watteau, the myths of Boucher and Lemoyne, the still-life of Oudry and Desportes on the walls hung with cloth in pastel tones were as though painted the day before. Their delightful colours and the charm of their design enchanted my eyes, thanks to the magic of that triumphant light. It heightened the golds and warm harmonies of the pieces by Riesener and Gouthière and Fortier, then lit up the multitude of precious things half-hidden in the shadow of the cases. At the sight of these treasures animated with new life, I better understood the climate of the land that saw their birth.

Imperceptibly a vanished world was replacing the modern world; and only through pieces embellished with all the refinements of art could I experience feelings of delight. Every moment I was reminded of Louis XV, and soon this



which besmirch his memory; and winning our sympathy and pity, even our admiration and respect. The troubles of this king, weighed down by heavy responsibilities, exposed to great temptations, who took on his duties with dignity, set up a solid barrier against the germs of disintegration and carried out some important reforms, seemed a dramatic theme and capable of furnishing a subject for the meditations of those who prefer truth to fiction.

This life of Louis XV, written always with a care for impartiality and justice, is as far from being an apologia as from being a piece of systematic criticism. The events which mark its course are analysed here in the light of the writings of the biographers and writers most worthy of credence. A scrupulous comparison of texts, a recognition of facts unknown to contemporaries, the lapse of time, have given us the power on many occasions to amend judgments dictated by passion. From his birth to his death I have followed the life of a much misunderstood sovereign; I have drawn him from no preconceived picture, but by giving credit to evidence worthy of belief and rejecting what was unworthy of consideration; never accepting any opinion without going back to the source from which it came. If the reader discovers new points of view in this piece of work, and the character of the Beloved seems nobler than he could expect, he must understand that it is only the quest for truth that has led me to formulate judgments that are at the first glance surprising.

memory dominated my thoughts. Before the portrait of Louis-Michel van Loo in which the regular features of the Beloved lived again, and before Nattier's Marie Leczinska and Rigaud's, Fleury's and Boucher's Madame de Pompadour, I called up the splendours and the miseries of a long reign — a picture intensified by touching memorials of the past, such as this Sèvres china inkwell, a present from Louis XV to his daughter Marie-Adelaide, and this embroidery frame once owned by Madame Louise.

The extraordinary destiny of a man, king at five years of age, who drained to the dregs the cup of joy and sorrow, whose kingdom underwent a complete social and moral transformation during his reign, who reached the heights of popular favour only to meet thereafter with slanderous and unjust calumny, a destiny so far beyond the common lot, seemed to me to have so exceptional a value that I resolved to devote some deep study to him.

It is from this desire, blossoming on foreign soil in the course of a morning's visit to Hertford House, that this biography was born. I have written with growing interest; for no life is more worthy of arousing the modern historian's interest, and no life so well reveals the greatness and the littleness of human vicissitudes. As my work of research progressed, the false picture of a Louis XV, voluptuous, selfish, and of no account, gave way to an infinitely more complex being — a Louis XV stripped of the legends and slanders

## Chapter I

### EARLIEST DAYS

Our joy fades in grief as day  
fades into night.      HANDEL

IN 1710 the reign of Louis XIV was drawing to its close and there remained to the king five years of life; five years of sorrow and anguish, five tragic years. After the radiant youth made famous by Charles Le Brun, the splendours and the conquests whose memory still endures on the walls at Versailles, after his triumphant manhood — the real apotheosis of a man who had reached the pinnacle of his desires and dreams — old age fell upon the sovereign. But old age could not touch his authority; and it was baffled by a mind that remained in complete control of his every action and reaction. Bereavement and anxiety never succeeded in bowing that robust body; nor could any trace be read in his countenance of the cares that overwhelmed him. To the dramatic events of a terrifying twilight the monarch opposed a stoic resignation and a firmness free from weakness; he faced adversity without lassitude or discouragement; he confronted the storm, a steady hand on the helm, without a sign of anxiety or fear. Reared on the precepts of antiquity and careful of his responsibilities he assumed his rôle of leader; and he played the last act of his existence with matchless dignity.

On the other hand every life represents just so much suffering and struggle, and its moments of happiness are so intermingled with its moments of suffering that it would be unreasonable to condemn it as a whole. Good actions as well as bad must be fairly dealt with. Besides, at the end of this biography I felt myself constrained by melancholy: Louis XV whose political works are often worthy of admiration has been judged severely by men who would have done well to consider the words of the Gospel. Modern criticism has taken the field against their severity, and the fog of calumny and lies is being dispelled to allow truth and tolerance to shine. As Michel de Montaigne wrote: "The bitterest and the most difficult profession in the world is the profession of king."



and in their turn gave to the world the inspiration of beauty and perfection. The stranger who had contemplated Louis XIV's youthful exploits and had seen him identifying himself with ancient heroes, decking himself in the armour of Alexander the Great, reclining on the breast of an Olympian gallant, immortalized by the paintings of the Hall of Mirrors, would look with surprise upon the maturity of this same monarch. Feasting, amours, gorgeous buildings, dazzling victories had given place to gray days; death had inflicted heavy losses on the royal family; enemies threatened France; poverty was increasing; and yet the sovereign performed his duties with the same authority and kept fast the barrier that constrained the most dangerous desires and ambitions. Around him was nothing but intrigue; and the Court lived in an atmosphere of vice and corruption. The same people ceaselessly jostled one another and moved round and round within narrow confines — too narrow for beings for the most part given over to idleness and the monotony of a precise and conventional etiquette. The presence of the king alone imposed respect among the crowd of courtiers. And it alone preserved the semblance of dignity. But an unsubstantial semblance. The manners of the Court as portrayed by Dangeau and Saint-Simon afford us a glimpse of brutality hidden behind an exterior of exquisite refinement. The excesses and debauchery of the Duchess of Berry give one an idea of certain aspects of Versailles; The Duchess of Burgundy's

If a man's attitude to misfortune is the measure of his repute Louis XIV never seemed more worthy of admiration and respect than in those last years of power. They formed a fitting crown to the task begun in 1643 — an imposing task inherited from Louis XI, Henry IV and Richelieu, and brought to a successful issue thanks to a pleiad of remarkable subordinates; a task of construction to which he devoted himself with ever-watchful enthusiasm.

Since the dark days of the civil war when his eyes had beheld the unleashing of greed and revolution which had so nearly destroyed the fruits of his father's efforts, Louis XIV had striven to establish respect for the authority of the king, obedience to hierarchies, and love of order and of work. He knew too well the deadly results of disorder and lack of discipline not to hold France in bonds of steel, suppressing mischievous desires, turning individual talents to the advantage of a collective material and moral prosperity. The nobility and Parliament had been brought to reason; every spark of rebellion had been extinguished, thanks to willing and discreet vigilance. With the establishment of peace within her own borders France was rising to the first rank of civilized nations; her victorious arms inspired fear, her institutions won admiration; her works of art surpassed those of all other countries.

Her literature and art, a beacon shedding light over the whole world, won her unrivalled supremacy. Versailles and Paris were replacing Athens and Rome,

A portrait by Largillière shows the Grand Dauphin, son of Marie Thérèse and Louis XIV, with his tutor Bossuet. At the sight of that elegant face with its dreamy eyes one thinks of the hopes centred in him, the promise represented by the heir to the crown of France. He had been trained by eminent masters: Henry and Huet for history and literature, Blondel in science, and then Bossuet who had written for him his "Discourse on the History of the Universe", "Politics as found in Holy Scripture", "Dissertation on the Intercourse between God and Man." A theorist who believed in absolute power and the Divine Right, Bossuet inculcated in his pupil a feeling of the responsible nature of his duties and his mission; he taught a doctrine set on foot by Louis XIV and taken up in another form by Louis XV. During the fifty years of his life the Grand Dauphin had no opportunity for putting into practice the instructions of his master. He was a submissive, respectful and docile son. A widower at less than thirty years of age on the death of his wife Marie-Victoire of Bavaria, he fell in love with Emilie Joly de Choin and lived in her castle of Meudon with the Princess of Conti and the Duchess, daughters of La Vallière and the Montespan.

A complex character, difficult to define, the Grand Dauphin is a figure of secondary importance — the personality of Louis XIV demanded it; what his reign would have been like, I cannot imagine; hypotheses would be too much in the realm of fancy. Certain aspects of his character

cruel mockery of the Princess of Harcourt bewilders and surprises us. That court, enslaved to the worship of the king, tamed and kept under constant surveillance, was in the eyes of Louis XIV the pledge of the security of the land.

Rivalry for precedence, international quarrels, sly jealousies and conflicts, seemed to him quite harmless compared with the danger represented by the independence of a fault-finding, undisciplined nobility. Under Louis XV this was replaced by another peril — the peril of a court that encircled and stifled the king, hid from him realities, isolated him from his people, occupied his thoughts and his attention; a peril of unparalleled gravity from which the monarchy was to suffer till the coming of the Revolution.

The recollection of struggles that had torn the royal family had led the Roi Soleil to refuse to admit any near relations to his councils. His brother Philip of Orleans never took part in affairs of state; he had to content himself with an inconspicuous life devoted to the arts and to literature, occupied in the beautification of Saint-Cloud and the pursuit of forbidden pleasures. Dogged by factions only too eager to test the royal power of a weak and indecisive character, Philip would have been a dangerous instrument in the hands of enemies of the established order. He died without playing any important part, after a life spent in the shadow of his elder brother, passing on to the future Regent virtues and vices that the latter was to carry to their worst extremes.

further from his thoughts. The coming into the world of this great-grandchild brought to a close the days of joy and prosperity. Henceforth there began a cycle of disasters. The storm was about to break on Versailles and lay it waste. Soon the gaps would multiply and death would leave the Roi Soleil in lonely isolation. His heart would be broken by the losses of what he cherished most. Of all his hopes, all his projects so lovingly conceived, nothing would remain. The great voice of Bossuet, some years silenced, alone could have drawn the lesson from such experiences borne with courage and resignation.

So nothing destined Louis XV, born at the cross-roads, to a premature reign. It needed unforeseen and cruel events to reveal the turn in his fortunes. His eyes opened on a dying world; the elder whose care encompassed him was to descend too soon to the grave; he would not be able to recall his appearance, but in his heart would remain veneration for that king whose virtues he desired to possess but never attained. The misfortunes which afflicted the royal family were to influence his mind and his intelligence. He was their victim and bore their mark. To try to explain the different aspects of so complex a character without giving prolonged attention to the conditions which favoured the development of that character would involve countless mistakes.

Louis XV owed much to his parents; surrounded by their care he should have been free from the passions and the faults which marred his character.

were found again in his children: the Duke of Anjou, later King of Spain under the name of Philip V, the Duke of Burgundy, husband of Princess Adelaide of Savoy, and the Duke of Berry who had married, to his misfortune, the daughter of the Duke of Orleans. The two last recall the mildness and the generosity of their father, his equanimity, his consciousness of duty, his bravery in the field, his passion for hunting and energetic pastimes.

Surrounded by son, grandson and great-grandson (the young Duke of Brittany born in 1704), Louis XIV began to see the realization of his hopes; a well assured succession to the throne gave him a valuable pledge of the future. He appreciated the obedience of the Grand Dauphin, admired the pleasing virtues of the Dukes of Burgundy and Berry and foresaw the continuation of his methods and his work after his death. That man whose will had smoothed out so many obstacles contemplated the result of his toil — a toil of more than sixty years of kingship. It seemed natural to him to be rewarded and to see near him submissive beings ready to continue the struggle begun more than half a century before. When on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1710 he was informed of the birth of the future Louis XV, he did not for a moment dream that, of all his family, this child alone would survive him, and would at five years of age ascend the throne of France. He would have received such a prophecy with a start of incredulity and fear; nothing was

sapping the principles taught by many centuries of experience, and shaking the edifice of monarchy.

Striving after an impossible perfection and a child-like equality amongst men, for a simplicity of manners that would have killed the arts and refined living, Fenelon was spreading an insidious poison. His ideas, taken up by Louis XVI and his court, were the cause of the upheavals at the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to his tutors and the admiration he bore his great-grandfather, Louis XV rejected these harmful ideas.

The austerity and taciturnity of the Duke of Burgundy were counterbalanced by the gaiety and lively charm of his wife Marie-Adelaide of Savoy. For years she was a ray of sunshine in the Court; Madame de Maintenon and Louis XV loved her with an indulgent tenderness. From her father Victor-Amédée, Duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia she had her adaptable and compliant temper, her skilful diplomacy, an intelligence that was alert and understanding, a keen sense of the reality of things, a lively recognition of the homage and respect due to her. Thrust at eleven years of age into a court where she knew no-one, she had been able to win the affection of all and to gain a lofty position without hurting anyone's susceptibilities. Frivolous, thirsty for pleasures and parties and festivities, loving entertainment, she passed on to Louis XV her passion for amusements, her tyrannical need of enjoying the good things of life and her love of gambling. In many

This orphan had been endowed with valuable qualities — his life will reveal them — but he had never been able to develop them fully. To the Duke of Burgundy he is indebted for a sound, equitable and mature judgment, a spontaneous love of solitude and meditation and a natural taste for hunting and camp life. Till 1736 he reproduced with extraordinary fidelity his father's virtues: his conjugal fidelity, his disregard of the coquettes of the court, his religious ardour, his loathing of sin. Later amid all his faults were still to be found his father's sentiments: piety that nothing could uproot; weariness of material pleasures, and genuine remorse at letting himself be carried away by them; and a sorrowful knowledge of his own vices. There remains a remarkable understanding of his functions as king; which led him to follow a line quite opposed to what Fenelon had taught the Duke of Burgundy, and to spare France the experiences that would have marked his father's reign. His father had received an education directed entirely to the condemnation of absolute monarchy — an education fed on chimæras and utopias; he had pored over the insipid "Tele-machus" composed especially for him, learned by heart "The Inquiry of Conscience into the Duties of Royalty", had been reared on the teachings of Fenelon with a blind confidence in his master. Now, that master, under cover of an apparent respect for the established order, was laying the foundations for the Revolution, weakening the cement that held the throne together,



an iron brace. If one places Gérard Edelinck's engraving of the Duke side by side with Coysevaux' bust of the Duchess which portrays her with all that artist's veracity, one sees what a happy mixture Louis was of all that was best in his parents, a mixture which nature had freed of all their imperfections. Contemporaries are unanimous in their praise of the child, the youth and the man; never did a handsomer sovereign occupy the throne of France. As sincere an observer as Quentin la Tour has, without flattery or exaggeration, left an unforgettable picture of him.

Each man is endowed with his own undeveloped capital; every man has in himself talents and faults. Education, training, the course of events, can modify the importance of natural gifts without ever destroying them. Nothing can change his nature altogether, the child is found again in the mature man. The influence of environment acts as a corrective; encouraging certain inclinations and tendencies, it corrects and improves or else perverts and disintegrates. As to Louis XV, his tastes and desires hardly changed except for the pursuit of sensual pleasures which had awakened late in him and the future importance of which none had foreseen. The child in the arms of Madame de Ventadour in that year 1710 had already the elements of a many-sided character. Mind and body developed and reproduced many traits borrowed by the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy from more distant relations whose blood he inherited. At the same time he suffered the immediate repercussions

ways in her thoughtless behaviour she was the forerunner of Marie-Antoinette; she acted on the stage, ruined herself by the extravagance of her wardrobe, sought the society of young people who got her into difficulties, and gave no thought whatever to the consequences of her actions.

A household containing a couple with such widely divergent tastes as those of the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy accounts for the duality existing in the soul of Louis XV. On one side Puritanical strictness, scrupulous piety, natural aversion from pleasures; on the other the heedless and lively disposition, Italian and French at the same time, of a victim to worldly pleasures who was good at heart.

Louis XV assimilated and transformed the mixture of contradictory qualities to which he was heir. Certain of his mental traits also could be traced back to his mother's mother, the Duchess Anne of Orleans, daughter of Philip of Orleans, a model wife and a careful educator, or to his uncle the Duke of Berry, whose mildness and kindness never succeeded in controlling the violence of his wife.

Physically there are as many similarities. To his parents he owes his fine eyes with their perfectly pencilled brows, a glance lively, keen and fascinating. The faultless red lips, the delicacy of his features, the slightly elongated oval of his face came from the Duke of Burgundy. In return he inherited from his mother a clear complexion and elegant bearing very different from his father's swarthy and crooked body supported by

Madame de Ventadour carried off the future Louis XV, followed by Marshall Boufflers, captain of the bodyguard.

The whole kingdom received the news of the happy event with sincere joy; sung masses were celebrated in Paris and in the Provinces — combined services of thanksgiving and rejoicing. A woman of rare intelligence, extreme kindness, deep devotion, Charlotte-Eléanore-Madeleine of La Motte-Houdancourt, Duchess of Ventadour watched over the Duke of Anjou with tenderness and care. For years she was the guardian angel of the puny delicate little being who had been entrusted to her care. She never thwarted him but excelled in understanding him and in finding the way to his heart; and she played an often difficult part with a mixture of gentleness and firmness worthy of the keenest admiration. Her letters to Madame de Maintenon reveal the fears, alarms and anxieties that the child's precarious health occasioned her. In April she feared for the life of the little being whose pale face and poor puny little body caused sober faces among the doctors. She needed tact and skill to handle so fragile a creature; she dared neither reprove nor scold him; and she wrote to Madame de Maintenon: "My one aim is that he should live." When death struck the royal family she trembled still more, and surrounded the sole heir to the throne with incessant care.

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 1711 death, haunting the palace in search of a victim, struck His Highness the Grand Dauphin. An epidemic of smallpox had

of the following years, — sorrowful years described with cold accuracy by the Marquis of Dangeau.

\*

Despite financial difficulties, threats from abroad and countless miseries, the recollection of the terrible winter that had preceded the month of February 1710 marked a turn in affairs, a slight diminution in the cost of living. The bread of the poor was sold at two sous, good white bread at just over four sous; the market at Saint-Germain drew a considerable public, people played high and everyone spent money; a less gloomy Paris resumed with enthusiasm her parties and amusements. For several weeks the Duchess of Burgundy had had to interrupt her dressmaker's activities. She was to be a mother for the third time. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays comedies were acted in her rooms; nearly every day she received visits from the King and Madame de Maintenon. Round her was collected an agreeable society, eager to profit by her generosity, and ready to keep her informed on every titbit of Court gossip and pique her curiosity and keep her amused. About 7 a. m. on 15th February, Louis XIV dressed in a few minutes and went along to his grand-daughter, whose baby was born at three minutes and three seconds past eight. Scarcely disguising his joy, the sovereign announced to the courtiers present that the child was to be a duke of Anjou; he was present at the short ceremony of baptism performed by the Cardinal de Janson and then withdrew while

ney; on the contrary he avoided them and practised really evangelical charity and generosity. When His Highness' jewels were divided up he wished to take as his share a magnificent ring in order to give it to a courtier named Dumont, an old retainer of his father's; and he sent in the same way a valuable jewel to Lacroix, Farmer-General of the Grand Dauphin, who had once lent him money without demanding interest. A model of all the virtues, the Duke of Burgundy was adored by the people. Touching stories were circulated about him; and his reign promised an era of happiness. Townsfolk and peasants welcomed in him a faultless prince capable of every kindness. So the announcement on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1712 of the illness of the Duchess of Burgundy roused great emotion. Like her husband she received the tribute of spontaneous popularity; her subjects hoped to see her on the throne; for her youth and grace formed a striking contrast to the austerity of Madame de Maintenon.

The Marquis of Dangeau noted the rapid development of measles, the danger of which doctors did not realize. The poor woman's sufferings from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> February were terrible; the fever did not leave her and she passed from exhausting excitement to total prostration and complained of violent headaches. Repeatedly opium and tobacco were administered; frequent bleedings from the foot relieved her momentarily but left her weaker. Everyone enquired with anguish for news of the Dauphine; the most mysterious rumours spread;

filled Versailles with consternation. The prince, after three days of suffering, died surrounded by Fajon, the Princess of Conti and Mademoiselle de Choin. On leaving the mortal remains of his son, Louis XIV betook himself from Meudon to Marly where he stayed in the rooms of Madame de Maintenon sunk in the lowest depths of grief. He had never had the least complaint to make against the dead man; he recognized his exemplary docility, his disinterested self-effacement and his good qualities. However when the body had been laid to rest at Saint-Denis on 16th April, everyone made haste to forget His Highness the Grand Dauphin and to go and pay court to the Duke of Burgundy who inherited his father's title.

An unassuming sensitive young man, he accepted the duties of his new position without manifestations of pleasure. Louis XIV, who loved him, appreciated the honesty of his character and, looking upon him as his immediate successor, had him take part in councils on finance, despatches and the Council of State, and initiated him into the machinery of power, without hiding from him its dangers and difficulties. He wished likewise to surround him with the honours due to his rank; he attached to his person nine courtiers known as *menins*, added to the splendour of his home, and guaranteed him one thousand francs a month. He would have been still more liberal if the Duke of Burgundy had not expressed a reluctance to increase public expenditure in any way. This high-minded prince pursued neither luxury nor mo-

of the greatest grief, points of etiquette still occupied the minds of those in charge at Versailles.

With an astonishing composure of mind Louis XIV had refrained from interrupting his business; the wheels of state ran as usual; he performed his duties without signs of depression and did not evade any of the demands of his task of kingship. He hid the extent of his grief, consoled the Dauphin; only a letter to the queen of Spain reveals the open wound in his heart; the world was not to see it. When in his turn the Duke of Burgundy had to keep to his bed, struck down by the same illness, it immediately gave rise to most profound alarm. Without fear of infection, the king came and comforted and strengthened him, and was there at the last moments of this young prince who died as a Christian and a brave man.

From then on every kind of fear had reign; the loss of his grandson created an atmosphere of uncertainty, full of peril for the kingdom. About half-past five on 19<sup>th</sup> February a long procession made its way from Versailles to Paris. The Bishop of Senlis was taking the hearts of the Dauphin and his wife to the Val-de-Grâce. They arrived at midnight by torchlight; a feeling of helpless sorrow overwhelmed the bystanders, just as it did some days later at the solemn burial.

Scarcely had the little Duke of Brittany assumed the title of Dauphin when the symptoms of measles revealed themselves on his body and that of his brother, the Duke of Anjou. Alarmed and fearing the worst, Louis ordered that the two children should

and already insinuations of poisoning were directed against the Duke of Orleans.

Often the door of the room where Louise-Adelaide lay dying was opened to let the king through. He went in without hope; already he had seen so many graves dug; once more he accepted this sacrifice with resignation.

After making confession to Father Noel, the sick woman was given extreme unction and the communion, and repeated the prayer of the dying. Her household forced themselves to reassure her and to hide from her the imminence of the danger; she was composed and drowsy. The day of 11th February seemed interminable, heavy with gloom and anxiety; the Court was in a state of suspense; concerts and balls were cancelled, people spoke in hushed voices. About seven o'clock, a bleeding having produced no result, the doctors prescribed a strong emetic the next day. Their poor remedies, their learned academic discussions were powerless against Death already seated at the foot of her bed. At eight the next morning the Duchess passed away at the age of twenty-seven, taking with her the affection of all those who had come into contact with her.

The following days saw the performance of the funeral ceremonies: the body was laid out and placed on a bier; on the 14th at six in the morning masses were begun at the two altars set up in the chamber of death. The bishops officiating had asked for chairs with backs; Dangeau wrote that they could have only folding ones. In the midst



at Madame de Maintenon's or else had a game of cards with some ladies. He always loved music and comedy and often heard: "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", "Le Cocu Imaginaire" and "Georges Dandin"; he took an interest in works of art and literature, forced himself into an inquiry into affairs of State, and his seventy-six years did not seem to weigh heavy on him.

Despite very bad weather, he hunted as he had in his youth; he spent hours walking at Versailles and Marly; he ate just as hearty meals, and endured great fatigue without complaint. The unexpected death of the Duke of Berry on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1714 caused a renewal of his anxiety about the Regency. Besides, he missed the good-natured, unassuming and charming man whose disposition reminded him of his brother, the Duke of Burgundy.

In less than four years five of his family had been taken from him; there remained only a frail sickly great-grandson, too young to be instructed in his future responsibilities. His hopes were centred on that child whose least ailment made the Court tremble; and who was watched over with the greatest devotion. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1712 Versailles learned with concern of the fever and convulsions of the Dauphin; some time after, severe pains and disturbing fainting fits added to the courtiers' terror. Sometimes he got into such a weak state that the doctors feared a premature end. Till he was six years old neuralgia caused him considerable suffering. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1712 the Dauphin had such pain that he howled all night; the next day Maréchal the king's

be baptised immediately. Godfathers and Godmothers were chosen among those near at hand: the Count de la Mothe and Madame de Ventadour for the Duke of Brittany; Monsieur de Prie and the Duchess de la Ferté for the Duke of Anjou. That was on 7<sup>th</sup> March; their consternation was at its height and not one disguised the extent of the disaster. Five celebrated Paris doctors came to consult with the Court doctors. They were a council of widely differing opinions; wretched charlatans, the best of whom was good for nothing. One need only read the works of the illustrious Fagon to form an estimate of the childishness of the cures of the period; the faculty killed more people than it saved; Molière's derision was not too strong.

Shivering with fever the little Duke of Brittany was entrusted to these vain and ignorant men. They gave him an emetic and bled him, and the child succumbed. They were preparing to start the same procedure with the Duke of Anjou, when Madame de Ventadour set herself against it with an energy, indignation and firmness that saved the life of the future Louis XV. Rescued from this murderous treatment and surrounded with watchful care the new Dauphin slowly recovered. He began to improve after 10<sup>th</sup> March; however, his health continually caused the Court anxiety. He was often sick in May, changed colour at the least exertion, had violent toothache, and showed himself excessively sensitive.

During the years 1713 and 1714 Louis XIV's life followed its usual lines. Every evening he worked

he delighted in official receptions, less frequent in these times of bereavement and economic difficulties.

However, on 19<sup>th</sup> January he was present at a magnificent ceremony in honour of his Excellency Mehemet Riza Beg, the Persian ambassador. To enhance the brilliance, Louis XIV put on heavy black and gold clothes spangled with diamonds; he wanted to dazzle, for he felt the need of confirming his power by the display of fabulous wealth. On either side of him the Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse glittered with precious stones and pearls, while the Duke of Orleans in blue velvet robes was covered with fine jewels. The Hall of Mirrors seemed too small for such a crowd. On the tiers more than four hundred ladies vied with one another in beauty and elegance. Held by the Duchess of Ventadour on a seat to the right of the throne, the Dauphin eyed with satisfaction his costume and his cap which were embroidered with precious stones; he took a delight in this amazing spectacle and betrayed neither shyness nor weariness during the long ceremony. Mehemet Riza Beg, after delivering what seemed mean presents and receiving magnificent gifts, showed a desire to go and pay his respects to the Dauphin in his rooms. When he appeared before him he found him so charming that he embraced him calling him "Indispensable Prince", a name given in Persia to the heirs to the kingdom. That embassy was to come to a sad end. After extraordinary reverses in central Europe Mehemet was obliged to sell Louis XIV's presents

chief surgeon found out that he had an abscess on his gum; when he pressed it with his finger black pus and blood came out. These bouts of violent fever and his vomiting, indigestion and attacks of prostration had come from such a small thing.

Physical fatigue sometimes overcasts with gloom an impressionable character; but when he was in better health the Duke of Anjou was delightful and charmed those who met him. His precocious intelligence astonished Madame de Ventadour; his witty repartees, his curiosity and his good humour captivated Louis XIV. Everyone passed on the child's amusing phrases; and his beauty and grace won everyone's heart. Countless stories were told about him; there were already the signs of the deep affection that was to surround "Louis the Beloved."

The flattering pictures in the letters of the Duchess of Orleans — the crystallization of the feelings of the Court — should be read. Nevertheless there was no one who did not know of the Dauphin's sudden fits of anger, his obstinacy, the moments when he shut up into himself, silent and stubborn, and his ridicule of the people he did not like. When the Bishop of Metz paid his respects to him he stared at him and exclaimed: "Heavens, how ugly he is!" At the beginning of the year 1715 he was in better control of his impulses, he showed a touching affection for Madame de Ventadour and his great-grand-father, and took an interest in everything he saw. Eager for knowledge,

that you may serve God well, act on the advice of Father Le Sellier whom I am giving you as confessor." Then addressing himself to Madame de Ventadour he said: "I owe you a great debt of thanks for the care you have taken in bringing up this child, and for your tender love for him; I beg of you to continue in it and I exhort him to recognize it in every possible way."

These noble words moved the bystanders; and unable to master his feelings Louis XIV gave way to tears, a thing which he had never done in public; the Dauphin left the room weeping and displaying the keenest grief. A little while afterwards the Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse arrived, and with them the Marquis de Jorcy, minister of Foreign Affairs, and Cardinal de Rohan and Cardinal Bissy. Overcoming his weariness the king spoke to them in a loud clear voice, saying: "Sirs, I am pleased with your services; you have worked for me faithfully and with the desire to please me. I am sorry not to have rewarded you better than I have done; times of late have not permitted it. I am leaving you with regret. Serve the Dauphin with the same affection you have shown in your services to me; he is a child, only five years of age, and is likely to meet with many obstacles, for I remember meeting many in my youth. I am going, but the State will always endure. Devote yourselves to it faithfully and let your example be one for all the rest of my subjects. Remain in unity and harmony; unity is the strength of the state. And

and fearing to come before his master empty-handed he took poison in 1717.

From January to September 1715, the Great King continued an existence whose days were numbered. He hunted, occupied his chair at councils, saw comedies and deceived his household about his state of health; but he did not hide from himself the approach of death. He foresaw his end and its consequences.

On seeing the Dauphin at the morning robing of the King, in July, Dangeau noted in his diary: "He is better than ever, he is growing fast and speaks with astonishing grace and accuracy; he knows a lot for his age, especially geography, to which he applies himself with pleasure."

Louis XIV used to look with emotion every day on the pretty face of this child of five. Under no illusions as to his state he hastened to make his final arrangements. So he summoned his great-grandson to his room at midday on 26th August, and kissed him and said: "You are going to be a great king, my son; but all your happiness will depend on your submission to God and the responsibility of helping your people. So you must avoid making war as far as you can. War destroys nations. Don't follow the bad example I have given you; I have often undertaken a war too lightly and have continued in it through vanity. Don't imitate me, but be a peaceable prince and let your chief object be to help your subjects. Take advantage of the good education you are receiving from the Duchess of Ventadour; obey her, and,

Maine; he was dressed in violet and stood at the door. The carriage crossed the boulevards of Paris; and a huge crowd kept shouting "Long live the King!", and admired their sovereign's beauty, his pretty smile and his good graces, while he repeated himself: "Long live the King!"

Dangeau was right when he cried that it was impossible to add to the people's love and affection for the king. In spite of his youth he had to be present at the Court of Justice on 12th September 1715, a wearisome duty for a child of five; and he played his part with ease, seemed quite unself-conscious, kept still, and did not complain of the heat. He was already getting used to his profession of kingship. In their turn he received the Dutch Ambassador and the Deputies of Languedoc, took an interest in what he saw and heard, asked intelligent questions, worked hard without becoming bored, and displayed a wonderful memory. He spoke in public without shyness or confusion, and made little speeches. His mind was alert and entertaining, and unusually acute. The opinions of Lemontey, Henri Martin, Michelet and numbers of others must give way before the irrefutable evidence of modern criticism.

If he had been lazy, narrow, cruel and wicked, Louis XV would have been a kind of monster. An iniquitously false legend with no serious foundation has been wantonly spread. It has distorted his character, giving rise to hateful tales, encouraging questionable story-tellers, and hailing joyfully the most unlikely accusations. Text-books

obey the orders my nephew gives you. He is going to govern the kingdom; I hope he will do it well. I hope that you will do your duty and that you will sometimes remember me."

During the days which followed Louis grew still weaker. Dangeau could say: "One must have seen the last moments of this great king to believe in the heroic Christian firmness with which he endured the approach of death." Besides he never ceased taking an interest in everything, small as well as great. He gave orders for the Dauphin to be taken to Vincennes where the air was pure, then remembering that the castle had not been lived in for a long time, he made them look for a plan of the rooms so that the Controller of the Household could use it. His memory and the clearness of his mind remained to an extraordinary degree to his last breath.

The fated end came at last. Mathieu Marais records it as follows: "The King, Louis XIV, died at Versailles at 8.15 a. m. on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September, aged seventy-seven all but five days, and in the seventy-third year of his reign. He was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1638, and began his reign on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1643. Louis XV, his great-grandson, succeeded him; he was born on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1710, and began his reign at the age of five years six months and fifteen days.

The funeral ceremonies were scarcely over when the Duke of Orleans sent the new King to Vincennes. He left in a coach on 9<sup>th</sup> September with Madame de Ventadour, Villeroy and the Duke of



his back, and declared that he would not eat at all if his uncle did not sit down beside him. He could not accustom himself to the honours that surrounded him, insisted on taking off his hat when the duke came to visit him; the moment he saw him he flung his hat into the middle of the room and said he thought he was failing in politeness if he did not do the same.

Full of mischief, he entertained his intimates by his amusing ways. He asked M. de la Vrillière who he was; the latter replied that he was his Secretary of State and that he had the honour to work under his orders; at once Louis XV took him into his room and ordered him to shell nuts. When M. Bon-temps came and knocked at his door the king spat in his face and said in a stern voice: "Go away, I am with my Chancellor." He derived simple enjoyment from the company of a child of his own age. He used also to sit to the excellent painter Hyacinthe Rigaud and talk with him in a familiar way; and in the course of a sitting that took place in the dungeon at Vincennes, he asked the artist was he married and had he any children. Rigaud replied: "I am married, Sire, but I have no children, thank God!"

Surprised by this answer he demanded an explanation. "Because my children would not have anything to eat", rejoined Rigaud, "as Your Majesty inherits all that my brush can earn me."

After the sitting the king interrogated Cardinal Dubois, who told him how the legal system worked out. Louis begged that Rigaud should

even nowadays still spread the misleading tales which are the basis of so many Frenchmen's knowledge of the childhood and youth of the king; scarcely credible fabrications have cast the simple truth into the shade. The truth is found in the diary of Dangeau, an upright man quite incapable of glossing over realities; it is also found in the memoirs of Mathieu Marais, de Buvat, the Marquis de Sourches, and Saint-Simon; it is found in the correspondence of Madame de Ventadour and Madame de Maintenon, and the letters of the Duchess of Orleans.

Moreover the National Library possesses the school books of Louis XV — proof irrefutable of his industry. Whole volumes in his handwriting bear witness to his zest for Latin, mathematics, history, geography, drawing, scripture, mythology; and they show how quickly he progressed. Far from being indolent and lazy, Madame de Ventadour's and Fleury's pupil seemed well in advance of the children of his own age. Since his stay at Vincennes life was regulated to the minute, there was little room for idleness or freedom. When he was out walking he liked asking questions about what he saw, his discussions were lively and his replies witty and derisive. His attitude to the Duke of Orleans was both deferent and affectionate; he was very fond of his fascinating uncle who overwhelmed him with kindness and attention. Shortly after the death of Louis XIV, when the Regent handed him his table-napkin at dinner, he refused to take it, put his hands behind

When he was not taking part in an official ceremony, the king lived in the open air, and acquired there a more robust health. Long walks in the woods or across the countryside delighted him. His capacity for walking, his need for exercise and his vitality surprised the courtiers; and his stay at Vincennes helped to strengthen and develop him physically. Nevertheless the Regent wished to get back to Paris and his amusements, and he consulted doctors on the possibility of Louis XV's returning to his capital. The Faculty hesitated, from fear of a recent smallpox epidemic, and advised waiting till the first frosts which would purify the atmosphere.

On Monday 30<sup>th</sup> December the royal procession reached the Tuileries; the child-king was delighted with this new change and his year ended in joy; the gloomy events which had saddened the kingdom could not yet cloud his brow.

be allowed to keep what he earned from the Hôtel de Ville, obtained his request, and joyfully told the painter of it the next day.

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The old castle of Vincennes re-echoed with unaccustomed liveliness; in the rooms formerly belonging to Anne of Austria the Regent assembled the Councillors of State, inquired into urgent business and forced himself to solve the most intricate problems. Louis XV occupied the Pavillon du Roi, refurnished on his account, while a huge retinue was lodged with the owner.

In the course of the year 1716 all established bodies came to congratulate the king; from May onwards there was an endless stream, the Grand Council, the French Academy, the Parliament of Burgundy, the Parliament and Council of Finance of Brittany, the aldermen of Toulouse, the papal legate, Baron de Sparre the Swedish ambassador, all came to pay him homage.

M. Martial De Pradel de Lamase, from whom I am borrowing these details, is emphatic about the strict ceremonial of each reception; he describes the first Regency Council held on 28th September, when the Duke of Orleans was met by the Count of Toulouse, the Duke of Maine, The Duke of Noailles, Saint-Simon, the Marshalls de Villars, d'Harcourt, d'Huxelles, the Duke d'Antin and the Secretaries of State Phelypaux, d'Estrées, Pontchartin and La Vrillière.

and 1729. Vices and perversions were paraded like poisoned flowers. Licentiousness was a principle. A whirlwind of madness was sweeping away a society that was no longer in control of itself. Yet under that scum there still remained solid virtues; if the morals of the Regency were a rebellion against repression, a violent reaction against former austerity, they affected only part of the population.

They were dancing on the brink of a volcano, but what of that! Better take advantage of the present, the future was no-one's business. The Scotsman Law might ruin the national economy, the country's enemies threaten her frontiers, disorder disturb public peace, nothing could interrupt the course of their amusements. It was an epoch blessed by artists of every kind, an age of liberty, of spontaneous outbursts of delightful freshness, favorable to the unfolding of talents essentially French in the grace of their wit and clarity. Bookshops offered their patrons in 1724 the third volume of *Gil Blas*, where fascinating adventures are related in language crystal clear; they offered likewise Voltaire's *Henriade*, Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, Marivaux' *Les Surprises de L'Amour*, Fénelon's *Dialogue des Morts*, Cardinal du Retz's *Mémoires*, Massillon's *Petit Caire*, the letters of the Marquise de Sévigny. Between 1716 and 1725 there was an abundance of works of the first rank. The unfolding of literature was an admirable reflection of the interests of the moment.

## Chapter II

### THE CHILD KING (1715—1725)

WITH a breath of spring to clear the air and intoxicating scents to perfume it, youth and joy sprang to life all over France and there began an era of festivals and rejoicing. Harlequin and Columbine reigned on the stage, surveyed by the great dreamy eyes of Antoine Watteau. A Paris intoxicated with pleasures and amusements was further enlivened by comedies, dances and music. Everyone tried to forget and drown his weariness and his troubles in merry-making. Conventions were relaxed, gambling, pleasure, the frantic pursuit of gold, freedom from restraint, went hand in hand. Nobles and commoners vied in recklessness and extravagance.

Philip of Orleans and the Duchess of Berry set the pace; their suppers at the Palais-Royal, at la Muette and Bagnolet ended in orgies; complete contempt of the laws of God and man held sway. The devout cried out at the scandal, while the people scented the corruption and were insulting in their contempt.

From the humblest lackey to the wealthy marquis all were carried away by a frenzy of debauchery; to make the most of life, drain the cup of pleasure, and try out every diversion was the sole wish in the hearts of the French between 1715

At the Tuileries, the residence of Louis XV, the apartments had been designed with the object of livening up their appearance, an object already in view at the end of the preceding reign. Speaking to Mansart on the subject of the redecoration of Versailles, the great king used to say to him: "It seems to me that there is room for change, the subjects are too sober, and a young element is needed. We should have something of youth everywhere."

The whole of France shared in this rejuvenation of people and of things; they were glad to possess a new Joas, a child king with a halo of purity and ingenuous charm. He represented to the future the promise of better times, the blossoming of a golden age. As the Regent saw his unpopularity increase, so the people's love for their sovereign grew continually; and it was shown in a touching way on the least occasion. Their attitude had in it a great deal of prejudice and injustice; Barbier shrewdly remarked in his *Journal* in reference to a slight indisposition of the king that had caused general uneasiness: "One can tell how necessary his life is, and how generally disliked the Regent is, by the interest taken in the king's health; for he has himself given no cause yet for either love or hate." In truth Philip of Orleans deserved some real indulgence for his faults and defects; he made up for them by reckless gallantry in the field, uncommon kindness, an alert mind, a manner that was easy and approachable, an agreeable and open disposition quite freed from restraint and

Nocturnal festivities, concerts and opera brought together remarkable composers; a certain Colin de Blamont whose *Fêtes grecques et romaines* was played in 1723, a Mouret, author of the *Amours des Dieux*; a Jean-Philippe Rameau, whose name is famous, thanks to a musical journal published in 1722.

The plastic arts followed this course: on the one hand Hyacinthe Rigaud, Nicolas de Largillière, Francois de Troy, Jean Raoux, Antoine Corypel continued the traditions in favour under Louis XIV, the ostentatious portraits and the pompous and imposing compositions. On the other, François Lemoyne, Watteau, Gillot and Lancret showed a vivacity and gaiety hitherto unknown. Lovers' rendez-vous, nonsensicalities, sylvan holidays, replaced heroic subjects; harmonious colouring added to the beauty of design and freshness of inspiration. Sculpture and architecture developed side by side, — a transition art winding up the estate of the past, borrowing generously from it, and introducing the works of the future. Towards 1715 Robert de Cotte erected on the Pont-Neuf the lovely Pavillon de la Samaritaine whose grace lived again in the brush of Raguenet. The simplicity imposed by the Roi-Soleil disappeared; women's dress was adorned with wide panniers, laces and ribbons. Mere servants decked themselves out with a refinement of artifice, while lackeys imitated their masters. Luxury was introduced into all classes of society; perfect taste accompanied it.



Duke of Maine and so many others whom he hated.

Yet the empty promises of Law beguiled the Regent; he saw in them the only remedy against bankruptcy and increase of the national debt. Inflation went to their heads; the wisest counsels were rejected, all prudence vanished. Soon in 1716 the Scottish adventurer founded the private trust and discount bank, then a year later the Western Company for the exploitation of Louisiana. He reached the height of his fame with the creation of the Royal Bank, and the India Company. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1720 he became Controller General of Finance and Master of the Public Revenue. The jobbery of the Rue Quincampoix is still celebrated; speculators made their money and were ruined there. The disaster came at last — the State went bankrupt with a deficit of three hundred millions; Law disappeared and died in obscurity at Venice in 1729.

Nevertheless the daring enterprises had rendered great services; they had shown the power of credit, increased foreign trade and stimulated private initiative. Beyond the frontiers the Regent's policy shows an intelligent understanding of the problems to be solved. Ever since 1715 he had called his old master, Abbé Dubois, to the State Council; and the latter was not slow in revealing great talent for diplomacy in negotiating the triple alliance of La Haye, which united against Alberoni's Spain England, France and Holland. Soon the adherence of the Emperor in 1717, the

arrogance, a profound understanding of the human mind, an extraordinary insight. He was discerning in his protection of the arts, he painted with skill and loaded the most eminent masters of the period with his favours.

The Palais Royal was adorned with countless works of art, and visitors were charmed by the delightful setting; the collections of the Duke of Orleans recalled Mazarin's and Richelieu's. There was a profusion of pictures, statues, pieces of gold and silver, jewels, prints, all kinds of things; treasures of the Thousand and One Nights brought together laboriously by a well-informed man with a sound and intelligent judgment. On political affairs his judgment was often happy; his schemes for financial reforms would have mended a dramatic situation. He came into power in a time of difficulty and dilemma; the public hated him, retailed the stories of his misdoings, his atheism, his dabblings in alchemy; he had the name everywhere of a *fanfaron du vice*. Louis XIV had kept him excluded from public affairs; he himself, bored by the Court, found the extreme formality tedious and was glad to rejoin the companions of his own choice. He had no respite till he had had his uncle's will rescinded by Parliament and had been given the opportunity of establishing a new Regency Council. Saint-Simon recounts these events with a bitterness and passion that forbade anyone to recount them after him; he shows the extent of his triumph by dwelling on the collapse of the Count of Toulouse, the

demands of State, the king displayed his feelings in a violent scene. Throwing his arms round the neck of the woman who had reared him, he embraced her tenderly and burst into tears. Madame de Ventadour said to him: "But, Sire, you must listen to reason." "Oh, mother", he replied, "I can't reason any longer if I have to leave you." After taking leave of the duchess he remained dejected and refused to eat and shut himself up in his grief. Just as he freely confided in those who found the way into his affection, so he disguised his feelings towards people he disliked; he excelled in hiding his thoughts, and spoke with deliberation. Already he was acquiring an inscrutable will, and making for himself a mask which betrayed no impression and gave no sign to indicate his state of mind. He entrenched himself in a dumbness from which he emerged only when he willed it.

One day the Regent asked Villeroi if his pupil was "reserved"; the marshall replied at once: "He is very much so, and he has certain methods of evasion by which he can cunningly mislead those who try to fathom him." But the unlucky influence of Villeroi was counteracted to some extent by the Cardinal de Fleury, named as tutor for the king by Louis XIV.

On the evidence of fanciful tales, many historians have cast anathema on the pedagogic methods of that prelate. Some make out that he encouraged the child's laziness, some that he tried to win his favour by his servility, so as to draw the sole profit

defeat of the Spanish fleet in the waters of Syracuse in 1718, and the discovery of Cellamare's conspiracy proved the perspicacity of the acute mind caricatured so bitterly by Saint-Simon. As archbishop of Cambrai, then cardinal and prime minister, Dubois received the reward for his services. The return of Spain to France, the projected marriage between Maria Anne-Victoria, daughter of Philip V and Louis XV, were his last efforts; he died in 1723 a few months before Philip of Orleans.

The responsibilities of government never prevented him from superintending carefully the education and instruction of the king, from studying his character and finding out his virtues and his faults. He had frequent interviews with Madame de Ventadour and Marshall de Villeroy, nominal tutor at the express wish of Louis XIV.

Honest and devoted but frivolous and empty-headed, the old soldier so harshly maligned by Saint-Simon was incapable of having a beneficial effect on his pupil's character. He flattered him, fostered bad tendencies, encouraged his pride and his obstinacy, checked his natural longing for simplicity and tranquillity. Concerned by the importance of his part he made himself a nuisance with his exaggerated attentions, and ridiculous through his weakness and his indulgence, and ended by offending the Duke of Orleans, who sent him off too late, the damage being irreparable.

When Madame de Ventadour had to leave Louis XV on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1717, and put him in the hands of Villeroy in accordance with the

materialism. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1716 the king was seen to listen to a long sermon with surprising attention, and then go and compliment the preacher in a tender and moving way. Later he was to have a true appreciation of the oratory of Massillon.

He performed the ceremony of the washing of feet on Holy Thursday with reverence and humility, humbly approached the Communion Table, touched all who were suffering from scrofula, and performed his religious duties without wearying. The majority of the courtiers were astonished at his encyclopædic knowledge and his prodigious memory. In 1717 he asked the nuncio, Bentivoglio, how many popes there had been, and when the prelate hesitated he replied: "You do not know the number of the popes, while I know how many kings of France there have been!" and he immediately enumerated them without forgetting a single one. Buvat perhaps exaggerates, however, when he admires the judgments of a child of seven whose replies, according to him, would have surprised the learned.

Slandrous tongues began to spread odious descriptions of the king all over the kingdom; a hateful picture which made him out to be afflicted by all the worst faults. After hearing such reports the lawyer Barbier, wishing to judge for himself went off to Versailles. On his return he noted in his Journal: "I saw His Majesty yesterday; he is well, and has a pleasing face and an attractive expression — by no means the gloomy,

from the material advantages of his situation. D'Argenson in his hatred for the Cardinal insinuated in his memoirs that he lent himself to the most ridiculous whims; he spreads the report that the lessons were spent in games of cards, and states that he saw a book of Quintus Curtius open at the same place for six months. For identical reasons the Abbé Bernis recounts the famous scene which has no authority; "I heard tell that one day M. de Sommery the king's deputy-tutor wanted to know how the instructor and his pupil were progressing. He entered the room suddenly on some pretext and found the Bishop of Fréjus sitting on a stool with the king standing in front of him putting curl-papers in the bishop's grey hair. That's not the way to teach a child, but it's the way to find the secret of pleasing him." This evidence from a man recounting long afterwards an uncertain happening has been sufficient to tarnish the memory of Fleury. Posterity accepted it without hesitation and refused to seek the truth in the Journal of Dangeau or of Buvat or in the Archives of the National Library. Writers of talent echo an absurd legend that is contradicted on all sides. We know in fact, from unquestionable documents, of the regularity of the hours of work imposed by Fleury, of the wise employment of these hours and the practical results of an instruction whose effects were numerous and beneficial. Being deeply religious the cardinal gave Louis XV principles of piety, cultivated his soul with edifying reading and set before him an ideal stripped of

1717 Philip of Orleans came to pay his respects and to tell him of the king's visit. That visit was conducted with much pomp and military display. The young sovereign was received on alighting from his carriage by the Tsar and conducted to a crowded hall, where he gave a little speech prepared beforehand and smiled so prettily that the Tsar rapturously embraced him several times; and could not stop showering him with praise and compliments, Prince Kourakin serving as interpreter. On 11<sup>th</sup> May there was a reception at the Tuileries; on 24<sup>th</sup> yet another meeting, in the course of which Louis XV handed the Tsar a plan of his states. And when they returned to their far country the Russian nobles gave a moving picture of this handsome little King of France, whose welcome had delighted them and won their hearts.

The almost constant necessity of appearing in public was combined with a need for physical exercise. The monarch must have a graceful carriage, ride, dance, hunt, review his troops, reply to ambassadors, receive guests, treat everyone in accordance with his rank, know the rules of etiquette to their last detail. So after the month of July 1720 he learned to handle a gun, walked in the Bois de Boulogne and at La Muette, shot rabbits, doves, and pheasants whose wings had been cut; and he proudly sent Villeroi a bird that he had just killed. The passion for hunting inherited from Louis XIII and Louis XIV gave him transports of delight. He was indefatigable

uninterested, stupid countenance generally attributed to him. He has a fine head and will make a good prince."

Fleury who had the king's confidence tried to discourage his more harmful qualities; he combated his pride, his bursts of anger, his fits of brooding; he endeavoured to make him proof against flattery, intrigue and the intoxication of power. If he sometimes was not sufficiently firm and let himself be blinded by a genuine affection, the impressionable and complex character of his pupil excuses him. To employ violence would have been a mistake; severity and remonstrance could have done no good; only persuasion had any effect. Impulsive and self-willed, the child-king demanded the attention of a supple and discerning mind; already he was a curious mixture of timidity and daring, of boisterous cheerfulness and of melancholy, of piety and of superstition. He excelled in winning the hearts of those who met him; Marshall de Villars and Villeroy thought him the most delightful and most lovable child in the world.

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Louis XV was eight at the time of Peter the Great's journey to France. All memoir writers speak of this event with a wealth of detail that proves its importance. Sumptuously furnished apartments at the Louvre were prepared for the illustrious visitor. But he found them too luxurious for a soldier, and installed himself at the Hôtel de Lesdiguières; and that was where on 8th May



animals. He spent whole hours before the aviaries at Vincennes and Versailles; and he had favorite dogs whom he fed with his own hands and had painted by Oudry. Count Fleury is emphatic about his large numbers of cats; one day, he said, Louis XIV was scratched by a cat belonging to the Dauphin, and Villeroi began to reprove the culprit sharply. "Now then", the Dauphin exclaimed, "don't you know that my cat doesn't like reproof any more than my uncle the Regent?" About 1722 the king had a cat called Charlotte with four delightful kittens; Marquis de Calvière relates that three died from too much fondling, within twenty-four hours. Many children can torment an animal from thoughtlessness or caprice without any one loading them with violent reproaches; but authors have always had an astonishing liking for slandering Louis XV.

The festivities which in 1721 celebrated the king's recovery show how little the French of that time believed in these calumnies. Unprecedented rejoicings roused popular excitement, tables were laid in the open air, wine flowed unsparingly; balls were prolonged far into the night; at the windows magnificent illuminations lasted for three days; specially distinguished were the libraries of the Rue Saint-Jacques. The women of La Halle went in a procession to the Tuileries, while the charcoal-burners came with drums and cockades in their hats. At the solemn *Te Deum* celebrated at Notre Dame, the magistrates, the great lords, nobles and commons poured in; the silence when the Regent

and astonished his household by absolute tirelessness. An expert horseman, he adored riding and he was seen in the saddle for whole afternoons without appearing in the least weary or fatigued.

The charge of cruelty so often brought against him rests on two stories alone; it has enabled people to censure Louis XV, the child king, for having blood-thirsty and cruel tastes. Barbier tells in his *Journal* of having heard that the king had a tame white hind brought to La Muette and wounded it; and when the poor animal came and fawned on him he harshly repulsed it and killed it in the cruellest way. Moreover Dangeau saw in the Swiss Guards' hall birds trained to kill sparrows; and he noticed the king present at this detestable game. Michelet, Jobez, Lemontey — the majority in fact of XIX<sup>th</sup> century historians — have hastened to seize on these two stories. Without inquiring into their value or their significance, they have added to them and exaggerated them, moulding them to the requirements of the thesis of their arguments. Now there is nothing to prove the truth of the scene recounted by Barbier; he accepted tales passed on from mouth to mouth and never mentioned by any intimate of the Tuileries. Dangeau who invents nothing has merely told of a happening readily admitted at the Court, and gives it the briefest mention without speaking of the king's attitude; his few lines were to be transformed into a long recital full of repulsive details likely to shock simple readers.

On the contrary, Louis XV seems to have loved

coach, his master, to be chastised for his fault; the owner's wife, a shrew, howled out of the window to hit him harder. When it was all over the populace entered the house, broke the windows, pulled the coaches out of their shed and set them on fire; nearly four thousand people found that means of expression for their righteous indignation.

The people of Paris, eager for sights, never missed an opportunity of seeing the king and his retinue. On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1721 they gathered in crowds near the Pont Tournant of the Garden of the Tuileries to see Mehemet Effendi, ambassador of the Sultan, pass as he made his way in great splendour to the Tuileries.

A picture by P.-D. Martin (in the Carnavalet Museum) brings to life again that brilliant cavalcade. A composition of Charles Parricel shows the arrival at the Palace, before a staring and curious crowd. Louis XV received Mehemet Effendi from a throne set at the end of the little gallery. He was wearing clothes embroidered with diamonds. Marshall d'Estrées and M. Lamond, who presented the Ambassadors, directed the ceremony. A sympathetic curiosity surrounded the oriental diplomat; the exotic was in fashion and they admired his fine and noble bearing and the richness of his robes. For his part the ambassador appreciated all he was shown; he went to hear an opera of Quinault and Lully, *Théséus*, and was pleased with it; and he returned to Constantinople full of admiration for such a delightful country.

arrived was noticeable, as was the frantic applause that greeted Villeroi and Madame de Ventadour. On 17<sup>th</sup> August the king himself came to the Cathedral in a two-horse carriage surrounded by his hundred Swiss guards and a huge retinue of courtiers. An eye-witness of the ceremony, Barbier tells that Louis XV would have come much sooner to give thanks for his recovery, if he had not been hindered by an ecclesiastical dispute.

The fact was that the canons of Notre-Dame claimed the sole right of saying Mass before the sovereign, while the High Chaplain asserted that it was his exclusive right. After many discussions the Regent decided that the king would not hear Mass in the choir but in the Chapel of the Virgin, a low Mass said by the High Chaplain. The French and Swiss Guard assembled on 20<sup>th</sup> August to sing a *Te Deum* to the accompaniment of the drum; they met in the Plaine des Sablons where the king complimented them on his return from the hunt. Thus Paris affirmed her loyalty with uncustomary magnificence; there were free performances of Italian comedy and everyone could find amusement. That population so easily roused did not fail to show its discontent at times; it detested injustice and displayed a critical temper. A coachman of the Rue des Grands-Augustins who had robbed his master of a bar of iron worth thirty sous was handed over to the magistrates and condemned to be flogged publicly and to be branded on the shoulder with a fleur-de-lys. He was placed before the door of the owner of the

got him to go in to the council escorted by de Villeroi and the Duke of Bourbon. Louis XV gave his consent with an abrupt *yes*, his eyes swollen, and with a sad and downcast air.

Paris and France learned the news with pleasure and astonishment; it cemented the peace between two neighbouring nations, and re-established their mutual confidence. Several hundred people went to congratulate the king and the Regent; and the Tuileries and the Palais-Royal were the scene of unusual animation. When he had recovered from his first astonishment, the young king's concern vanished; and learning that the Infanta of Spain was four years old he said to a courtier who came to compliment him: "I am further on than you, I have a wife and a child." An act of clear-sighted diplomacy, this union revealed once more the excellent policy of Dubois and the Regent. It calmed fears and answered all the demands of the immediate present. The extreme youth of Philip V's daughter had nothing in it to be feared; for the king could wait till he was twenty-two to marry a princess of fifteen. It was infinitely better to let this time elapse; for it would benefit Louis XV both mentally and physically.

To celebrate their happiness the aldermen of the city of Paris ordered from Largillière an allegorical composition representing: "*the king seated on his throne surrounded by three Graces; the Regent; the Duke of Orleans, the mainstay of the throne guided by Minerva the symbol of wisdom, covering him with his shield and holding in her hand the portrait of the Infanta borne by*

A little while afterwards another event roused lively interest. The notorious Cartouche, terror of town and countryside, fell into the hands of justice and suffered the punishment for his exploits. Finally in that same year 1721, the public learned of Louis XV's betrothal to the Infanta of Spain.

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Saint-Simon wrote in his memoirs: "It was about time to announce the king's marriage; and the Duke of Orleans did not let himself be concerned as to how it would be received by the prince who was startled by surprises, and by the public because of the youth of the Infanta who was still a small child. The Regent decided at length to take a day for a regency council, and just before the meeting to inform the king about his marriage, and directly afterwards to declare it to the regency council." After many discussions between the Duke of Orleans, Fleury, Saint-Simon and the Duke of Bourbon, the news was announced to the sovereign in the presence of a few of his intimates. It had a violent effect on the nervous, sensitive child; he turned red and his eyes filled with tears, and his face was a picture of consternation. The Marquis de Villeroi shaking his head exclaimed: "Come, Sire, you must accept it with a good grace!" Fleury in low tones tried to persuade him to be present at the council and hear his marriage proclaimed. On seeing how disturbed he was, Philip of Orleans told them to leave him for a few moments to compose himself; then he

apartments of Anne of Austria were redecorated again; the slightly severe look of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century disappeared; and a delicate hand applied more charming touches. High windows opened on a garden planted with elms; flowers, shrubs, a stretch of lawn, recalled the beauties of nature amid the grey stones. This garden still bears to-day the name of Jardin de l'Infante.

Saint-Simon was given the embassy of Spain, a magnificent embassy that appealed to his vanity. Entrusted with the duty of the signing of the marriage contracts, puffed with pride and importance, he had to parry the deceit of Cardinal Dubois who was glad to get rid of an enemy, and was eager to compromise him and make him ridiculous by multiplying the diplomatic difficulties in his way. On 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1722 the Infanta arrived at Paris. Barbier has left a detailed account of the ceremonies that marked her coming, of the lack of eagerness and the coldness on the part of Louis XV, and the little princess's simple confidence, and the extreme satisfaction shown by Dubois and the Regent.

On meeting his betrothed at Bourg-la-Reine, the king embraced her without saying a word; nor did he address her during the reception that took place later at the Louvre. He was not moved by her beauty or her grace, and looked upon her as a doll and of no importance. The Queen-Infanta, thus she was named already, entered the capital in triumph; Parliament came to give her its good wishes and pay her homage; lavish banquets took place at the Hôtel-de-Ville and the Palais-Royal;

*two genii, one holding the lion of Spain, bound by a blue ribbon to the cock of France, and the Golden Fleece and other things symbolic of the union of the two countries."*

The same artist painted in 1722 the delightful little Spanish princess dressed in white satin adorned with jewels, her right hand resting on a cushion which supported the crown, holding a fan in her left. It was a pretty face, fresh-complexioned, with beautiful eyes and regular features but a malicious, obstinate mouth. In this fine portrait there lived again the daughter of Philip V, the niece of the Dukes of Burgundy and Berry, the great-granddaughter of Louis XIV and the cousin of Louis XV.

Her father had never forgotten a country that he had left with regret; the Princess of the Ursins, a group of French collaborators, had kept on intimate terms for a long time at the court of Madrid with our ambassador Amelôt and the Controller, Orry. The era of criticism and fantastic ambitions once past, Spain wished for a reconciliation and welcomed the Regent's proposals with joy. A double union would seal the alliance of the two peoples, the marriage of Louis XV and the Infanta and that of the Prince of the Asturias and Mademoiselle de Beaujolais, daughter of Philip of Orleans. So he had wisely decided to send Maria-Anne-Victoria to Paris immediately to accustom her to her new country and let her learn to know the king. Thus the shocks and jars caused by mutual misunderstandings were averted. In the Louvre, occupied by the king since 1719, the



cordant elements could henceforth sap the authority of the king, distort his character and spread false tales; and a stranger would be able to turn opinion skilfully to his own profit. Writers and magistrates completed the work of disintegration; and they gained all the more credence because no-one could control their sayings and their affirmations.

If the palace, created by Louis XIV to give the monarchy a protection against popular risings and to remove it from the insecurity of Paris, was a shining light in the firmament of thought and of the arts, it contributed to the fall of the régime, and increased the disastrous tendency for the king to be surrounded by courtiers unconscious of what was really happening. Versailles was at once too near and too far from Paris; it isolated the sovereign without protecting him from riot or revolution — as the events that marked the last years of the century were to prove. No-one dreamed of such disadvantages in 1722; all congratulated themselves on finding once more an enchanting, really admirable luxury, an atmosphere fitted for intrigue, and a residence reserved for those few who were privileged by birth or fortune. After loving the Tuileries so much, Louis was yet happy to leave them and breathe a better air and live surrounded by wide domains, and so more easily satisfy his taste for hunting and violent exercise.

It seemed as if he had never cared for the narrow streets and confinement of town-life, and that he preferred wide horizons, and trees and flowers and streams. Long before Jean-Jacques Rousseau he

and a solemn *Te Deum* filled the vaulted heights of Notre-Dame.

Saint-Simon recalls the words of this strangely alert, precocious little girl who was amazed at Louis XV's dumbness and tried to break it. One day she asked the king if he liked fireworks; he replied briefly, "Yes", whereupon she clapped her hands and cried "Well, he has at least spoken to me!" No real friendship could unfold between them; Villeroy's disciple regarded the Infanta from very lofty heights and disdained her. At twelve he thought himself already a man; he was mature for his age and possessed an experience, a feeling of his own dignity and a pride very rare at his age, but understandable in the light of the life he led and the events he had witnessed or in which he had taken part.

The years would certainly do away with his prejudices and his mistrust, but an unlucky piece of diplomacy soon destroyed every hope.

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A serious decision fraught with many consequences brought king and court to Versailles on 15th June 1722; Paris was definitely abandoned; the people no longer went every day to look at their sovereign, praise his virtues, acclaim him; and affirm their ardent loyalty; once more the contact was broken. Far from his capital Louis XV often failed to understand its aspirations and its desires; he did not know its reactions and even feared its complaints and lack of discipline. Dis-

over his person, preserving him from possible attempts at poisoning, and jealously safeguarding his health. As Saint-Simon notes, he was not slow in finding out how empty were his alarms, and contriving a way to get rid of that troublesome person. Fleury showed him that no-one dreamed of giving him poison and that it was purely an invention of the marshalls. He succeeded in destroying all attachment, gratitude or affection. The young king forgot Villeroi and did not wish to hear any thing more about him.

On 9<sup>th</sup> August he was confirmed in the palace chapel, and then took his first communion with humility and fervour. Saint-Simon speaking of him at this time writes: "We are beginning to think well of his mind and his sensibilities." The shrewd psychologist noticed likewise his intelligent remarks; but also a strange inclination towards solitude, an instinctive aversion from the world and a taciturnity which he strove to overcome. Fleury taught him to master himself, and not to cease to cultivate his mind; he accustomed him to the requirements of his duties and warned him against his tendency to melancholy.

The ceremony of consecration took place on 25<sup>th</sup> October at Rheims; d'Argenson said a little while afterwards: "It will be long remembered how like Eros he looked with his long robes and silver cap, the dress of a neophyte or of a king to be. I have seen nothing more appealing than his face was then; our eyes were moist with tenderness for this poor little prince who had

sought solitary spots and pastoral scenes, and felt the grandeur of what man had not yet profaned. He had at Paris already begun to take a daily walk at La Muette or the Bois de Boulogne, loving to intoxicate himself with movement and to stretch his muscles and test his strength and suppleness. At Versailles he established himself, as did the Infanta, in the old royal apartments; Cardinal Dubois superintended the castle while Villeroi occupied what rooms were vacant. A meticulously conventional life began to be unfolded in the same invariable rhythm. Most of the customs set up by Louis XIV were still followed. For a mixture of respect and admiration preserved the laws decreed in the previous reign. At the same time, cabals and rivalries, hatreds and jealousies resumed their customary course; first it was the astonishing fall of the Duke of Noailles, former president of the Council of Finance; then the fall of Villeroi, plotted by Dubois who detested him and with reason. The marshall had committed a serious fault in exaggerating the importance of his part and in assuming the right to forbid the Regent to speak with the king alone. He wanted to be present at their meetings, he said; for it was his duty never to leave his master. Incensed at such behaviour Philip of Orleans set a snare for him and finally exiled him at Lyons with the position of governor of the city.

Louis XV bitterly bewailed this man with his flattering tongue and clever insinuations; for Villeroi had persuaded him that he was watching

ment and financiers rejoiced at the removal of a man whom they unjustly accounted responsible for a recrudescence of immorality and atheism, and for the economic ruin and the waste of the State resources.

Historians, novelists, pedagogues have ever since represented Philip of Orleans in the most gloomy colours. In exaggerating his vices they have knowingly misinterpreted his virtues, his devotion, his services to France and to the king. Far from satisfying themselves with Saint-Simon's whole-hearted testimony, many writers have imbibed their information from the pamphlets and the deliberate satires of the period. Of their own accord they chose to ignore the advantages conferred by the Regency.

It would be ridiculous to take one of Boucher's, Baudouin's or Fragonard's engravings for an exact picture of the customs of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century; so, also, to exaggerate the importance of the gaieties at the Palais-Royal and to misconstrue the immense constructive work realized between 1715 and 1723, would constitute a serious historic falsehood. If the Regent's personality has been distorted and falsified, has been reduced to unfair proportions and slandered by men like Michelet, Louis XV, the child, has met with just as much injustice; historians have taken a delight in accepting in good faith any story, however absurd, everything that could make him hateful and despicable. Between fanciful pictures and exaggerations, persisting for two centuries, and the truth that rests on the most

escaped so many dangers in his youth." Such was the impression on the part of other memoir-writers, witnesses of the coronation festivities. The kingdom congratulated itself on possessing a young and beautiful sovereign; the people expressed their love in a simple touching way; and there was no shadow over the spontaneous outbursts of feeling throughout France.

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In February 1723 Louis XV attained his fourteenth year, the age fixed since the time of Charles V for the majority of a king. The Regency was at an end.

Dubois, appointed Prime Minister, died on 10th August; he was succeeded by the Duke of Orleans for a few months, but the latter had an attack of apoplexy at Versailles on 21st of the December following. This double bereavement brought in the detestable government of the Duke of Bourbon and Mme de Prie.

The king sincerely regretted an uncle who had surrounded him with a deep sincere friendship. "Touched by his invariable respect, his care to please him, his way of speaking to him, and his method of working with him, the king wept and was really affected by his loss; so much so that he has never spoken of him since — and he often does so — except with esteem, affection and regret." Saint-Simon's words are the absolute truth. The king's sentiments were in no way shared by the Court and the city. Church, Parlia-

Jeune which drove Mathieu Marais to write: "Quinault and Lully, where are you?" Some days afterwards Louis XV danced several entrées with grace and suppleness; but he quickly turned from these amusements which bored and wearied him; for months he refused to take part in any festivity. In February 1722 he attended neither opera nor comedy.

One passion alone had taken a violent hold on him — gambling. From the age of eleven he had unreservedly devoted himself to it. Mathieu Marais wrote on this subject: "The king slapped the face of one of his favorites, the Chevalier de Rèze, the colonel of the King's regiment, in a dispute over a game. Rèze said to him: "That's the first king who ever slapped a nobleman; if Your Majesty were older I should never appear before you again." The king in anger told him he could withdraw and that he did not want to see him again. The king was punished for several days, and that finished the matter." Naturally impulsive he lost control of his actions on a few occasions. In the month of January 1724 he was seen to take his shirt from La Trémouille's hands, when he rose, and give his first valet, Bontemps, a resounding slap for no reason at all. A witness remarked that this seemed a doubtful joke and it was not well received at Court.

Louis XV, being tall and strong, was always wanting to wrestle with his friends, and used to give them quite hard knocks and bruises. He used to demand that people should follow him in the hunt

reliable foundations there is a wide gap. At the beginning of the year 1723 the child-king appeared in the most favorable light from the moral point of view as well as at the physical. Far from delighting in laziness and bored indolence, he got up early and received the princes of the blood from eight o'clock in the morning. An industrious worker with an inquiring mind, he retained and assimilated perfectly the lessons of Fleury; his education was taking on an encyclopædic character and he specially interested himself in history, geography and heraldic art. He was not insensitive to poetry and the arts, and enjoyed mental exercise.

In 1722 his little court consisting of the Duke of Retz, the Marquis de Calvière, Lapérouse, Moussy and Champcenetz composed letters in verse addressed to Mme. de Langamet. According to Mathieu Marais, Calvière was the author of the prose and the verse, but Louis XV had composed the plan and set his signature to them. These witty and amusing missives well reveal the prince's preoccupations; he informed the lady that the nymphs of Versailles were superior to those of the Tuileries; and wrote her news of his cats, Pasca and Charlotte, and told her that silkworms refused to spin a cocoon away from Versailles.

Comedy amused him, and he attended with pleasure, often giving his opinion; his judgments already showed a surprising nicety. Villeroy, an expert dancer, had striven to give him a taste for ballet; on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1722 the *Ballet des Rois* was repeated — a mediocre piece by Corypel le



Sometimes his jokes went too far. In June 1724 the young king's mischief went quite beyond the limit; he cut up ties, shirts, costumes, snatched wigs and sticks, hit his companions and trimmed the eyebrows of his three squires. Still, in these doubtful jests there is nothing to be seen but the foolish amusement of a person who was too spoiled, and accustomed to gratify every caprice. Caprice sometimes harmless like the institution of the Order of the *Moustache* and of the *Dressing-room*, that gave its members the right of entry into the king's room. Among his favorite amusements Calvière notes: the *Game of Shuttlecock*, the *Wolf's Tail*, and illuminations made with tiny wax candles; he lays stress on the Pastry Parties; Louis XV adored making omelettes or preparing savoury chocolates.

He had a rigid attitude towards morality and afforded a proof of it in January 1723. Knowing that Bontemps, the father of one of his first valets de chambre, had brought his mistress Zénobie to Versailles, and that he had dined with her, he asked Bontemps the son with whom he had supped: "With my father, Sire," — "And who besides? Don't lie to me!" He had to admit the woman's presence. The king gave orders on the spot for her to leave Versailles. If he avoided women with a curious repugnance, it was a strange friendship he gave the Duke of Trémouille, the first nobleman of the bed-chamber. The examples of Henry III and his favorites haunted the Court and filled it with misgivings. Wise measures how-

without showing any fatigue; and he had no pity for women, whom he scorned or did not even look at. To Bachelier, one of his valets de chambre, who had not dropped out of his long rides, he gave a horse richly harnessed, a brevet with a pension of four thousand francs and a gold stick; furthermore he intended to pay him a visit on his estate at La Selle near Versailles. Following his father's example he let neither storms nor bad weather interfere with his activities; he rode without respite over woods and plains and showed himself of extreme daring, fancying to halt always in isolated and remote inns.

The practice of violent sports developed and hardened his body; and the last traces of a delicate constitution disappeared. The puny child tenderly watched over by Madame de Ventadour became a strong and healthy young man.

His mother the Duchess of Burgundy had passed on to him a natural liking for jest. "One day", Marais wrote, "he asked the Marquis de Nesle if he was in military service; the latter replied that he was not any longer but that he had served in the gendarmery. The king said to him: "Why didn't you buy a regiment when you left?" "There were no more for sale", said he. "Good", said the king, "more than one hundred have been sold since"; then he added in Swiss, "*Ly estre poltron*", which very much astonished the marquis, and the Court saw that the king who spoke so little opened his mouth only to make a pointed remark to a man of quality. "There's a man who's not worth much — another fool."

dents or indisposition. When Abbé Alary expressed regret that he had not had himself bled to reduce a violent fever, Louis XV replied: "I have never been bled, my blood-vessels are sound, and besides *it would cause a lot of talk in Paris.*" An appetite like Louis XIV's, he stayed for a long time at table, overate and liked game and beef and pastry; he was always interested in food.

If the king reviewed his troops he also had to command them in time of war, know strategy, be able to talk to the generals in charge and give out an opinion or advice or a wise reflection. It was by no means enough to have excellent military leaders; so, from the month of September 1721, Louis XV took part in the attack and defence of a fort between Montreuil and Versailles. His eyes never left the movements of the regiments and followed every phase of a sham siege with its trenches, attacks, cannon-fire, mines, surprising of convoys, helping of the wounded and final capitulation. Certain dispositions being badly chosen, spectators had their horses burned by the blank bombs, or were bruised by them. So the young king's education followed a methodical course; bodily and mental exercise went hand in hand, leaving little room for laziness and indolence. If that education had not been excellent, if it had been continually interrupted on the most frivolous pretexts, if, as so many historians maintain, Louis XV's youth had been spent in idleness and neglect, we should never possess the remarkable letters written by him in the course of a long reign; or the lucid

ever averted the peril; for Charost, Villeroi's successor, kept a tactful and intelligent watch. Sincere piety helped keep him safe too; Fleury and his confessor, Father Linières, strengthened noble feelings in his impressionable soul, the prey of a thousand temptations and a thousand sources of contamination.

Louis XV made good use of his power before he came of age. In 1720 he created a regiment of young lords who changed guard every evening on the terrace of the Tuileries; and he conferred on this regiment the name of *Royal-Terrasse*; and later endowed a hospital at Versailles.

When he attained his majority he began on 16th February by cancelling all the Rights of Entry to his room and decided to make his own grants. He divided them into four classes: friends, family, great and small entries, and intimates. Already he was astonishing the courtiers by the establishment of the Right of Friendship unknown before; and he surprised them by including the Princes of Lorraine in no class at all.

His character remained an enigma for the Court. Sometimes an insuperable distaste for the world and an imperious need of solitude took him to Meudon, Fontainebleau or Rambouillet, far from inquiring eyes and flattery. The first time he supped in public was at Marly on Friday 27th August 1723 on his return from a hunt. The meal lasted from five to seven o'clock and there were twenty people present. At his least ailment Versailles took alarm; so he preferred when he could to hide hunting acci-

ADOLESCENCE AND MARRIAGE.

(1725—1726)

LIKE a princess from the Arabian knights, the Infanta watched for the king's coming and sighed at his indifference. Returning from an interview where she could not get any sign of friendship or mark of interest, or any word even tinged with kindness, she sadly confided in Madame de Ventadour; "Mamma, he will never love me." "He will love you when you are married," the duchess replied.

A little while afterwards, her brother Don Carlos gave her news of Mme de Beaujolais his destined bride and in very affectionate terms; and she immediately exclaimed: "They are not married, Mamma, and they love one another!" — pathetic words from the lips of a little girl only seven years old whose heart was being wounded for the first time in her life.

Versailles and Paris were already spreading the most fantastic tales about her: — "she would stay small, for she had not grown at all in a whole year; she had a twisted intestine and could not have children." Ready rumours and satires supported the schemes of Louis-Henri de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, now Prime Minister. Having removed from power the Duc de Chartres, son of

addresses to ambassadors and ministers, or the wise and considered advice he sent to his son and grandson.

Gifted moreover with a rare perspicacity and a sound feeling in affairs of State, with a natural good judgment in matters of art and letters, the sovereign at manhood necessarily repaid the benefit of his years of study and work. When he wanted to express a thought or to give his opinion on however difficult a subject, Louis XV showed a culture surprisingly wide and comprehensive. The seed sown in good soil produced a rich harvest. Without a true appreciation of the years of childhood and youth — the latter very short — the modern historian could not explain the different sides of the king's character, the sources of his knowledge and the development of his virtues and his faults.

Married at fifteen, father of five at twenty, it is between 1716 and 1724 that his character was formed. That period alone gives one a true and impartial knowledge of the events that were to be, and it alone throws a bright light on the personality of Louis XV.

not be enough to wipe away the grief we have in being forced to send her back."

The king of Spain, hearing of the rupture, was overcome with anger. He wrote that he would certainly not have his daughter stay more than three days in France, and ordered the departure from Spain of the dowager queen and the *Princesse de Beaujolais*, the betrothed of *Don Carlos*, and required them to arrive at the frontier at the same time as the *Infanta*. Moreover, our ambassador, *Abbé Livry*, and *Count Robin* received orders to leave Madrid within twenty-four hours, and Spain within fifteen days.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April *Maria-Anne-Victoria* gave a last kiss to *Madame de Ventadour*, and departed from a hostile Versailles where she had had such a dull time. She left loaded with jewels, toys, clothing, and rich and magnificent presents. The *Duchess de Tallard* accompanied her as well as a Spaniard, *La Loysa*, whose anti-French sentiments were very often plainly revealed. Being about to become a mother she urged the retinue on, not wanting to bring an infant into the world in a land she loathed. Received at the frontier by the *Marquis of Santa-Cruz* and *Donna Maria de las Nieves*, the *Infanta* saw her country with delight, showed sincere joy, and declared she did not want to be married any more. *Philip V*, estranged from the *Duc de Bourbon*, approached the *Emperor of Austria*. Thus the projects fostered by the *Regent* and *Cardinal Dubois* came to naught.

the Regent, he desired the humiliation of the branch of Orleans and the elevation of his own family. Nothing was further from his wishes than the sovereign's untimely death; that would bring about his enemies' rise to power and his own downfall. He had with all speed to secure a succession from the young Louis XV. And the Infanta could not have children for seven or eight years.

He was head of the house of Condé, and he worked for that house; and the calculations of that man who had been minister for twenty-three years reveal astonishing obstinacy and an inflexible will. A rake and a gamester, his scandalous exploits were legion; his friendship with Law has escaped not one of the chroniclers of the period; the suppers at Chantilly were a match for those of the Palais-Royal. The Marquise de Prie, a woman of remarkable beauty, had an unfortunate influence on him, pushing him towards England, protecting Pâris-Duverney, not ceasing to call for the dismissal of the Infanta, and taking a hand in all diplomatic affairs.

A meeting, attended by the Duc de Bourbon, Fleury and Villars, in February 1725, decided the departure of the Spanish princess. When Don Patritio Laules, the ambassador from the Court of Madrid, was informed he was incensed and cried: "All the blood of Spain would not be enough to wipe away the shame France causes my master by sending back his daughter!" To which the Prime Minister replied: "All the tears of France would



fear on that side, — King Stanislas would welcome with gratitude an honour to which he did not dare aspire. The little Polish girl, of a pleasing character and exemplary piety, would be at the disposal of those who raised her to the summit of her ambitions. Through her it would be possible to influence the king, and to derive great material advantages. Although she was six years older than the sovereign she seemed likely to win his favour and to give him heirs very soon. Their plans once decided, the Duc de Bourbon, without bothering about the welfare of the country or of the heart-rending poverty of an alliance that brought neither acquisitions of territory nor diplomatic advantages nor financial support, set himself to force his wishes upon that country and to execute them with the least possible delay. On 31st March he succeeded in convincing the king of the excellence of a marriage that fulfilled every requirement of morality and well-being. Fleury, anxious not to compromise himself, reserved his opinion and gave no advice.

The dealings were kept a secret; until 21st May none could say who was to be queen of France; curiosity carried to its farthest limits gave rise to fantastic guesses. Finally on Sunday 27th, Louis XV announced his marriage to the courtiers who came to salute him when he rose in the morning. The Duc de Gesvres, first gentleman of the Bed-chamber, immediately passed on the news to the Court. Astonishment and incredulity were written on everyone's face as if it were news of a severe

For months the topic of all conversations was the king's marriage; scarcely two or three were gathered together without a discussion of this grave event. An edict had to be given out proclaiming prison to those who talked about it; cafés, drawing-rooms and public-places kept open house for rumours, dangerous suppositions and ill-authorized criticisms. Society's fashionable game was to guess who would be the future queen; and one by one the public explained why the various parties had been rejected. "The Infanta of Portugal had a mad father, — the Princess de Hesse-Rhin-feld's mother gave birth to daughters and hares alternately, — the princess of Lorraine through her connections with the family of Orleans did not find favour with the house of Condé, — the princess of England was a protestant, as for the Austrian princesses, they seemed too old."

However the Marquise de Prie and the Duc de Bourbon attentively examined the list of girls suitable for Louis XV; there were numerous difficulties in their way, for they hoped for a kind, submissive person, easily managed and perfectly healthy. After meeting with a refusal from the Prince of Wales and rejecting the offer of Catherine of Russia and rebuffing the Princess of Lorraine, Mlle de Vermandois, sister of the Prime Minister, seemed a suitable parti. Of a rare intelligence, great beauty and wonderfully healthy she was set aside, for her hatred of Mme de Prie was not a mystery to any courtier. Despairing of a subject, eyes were turned towards Marie Leczinska; no obstacle to

François Boucher and Nattier. The Marquise de Prie, admiring his talent, had charged him in February 1725 with a diplomatic mission. On the pretext of going to study the ornaments brought by Cardinal de Rohan to the castle of Saverne, he took himself off to Alsace and stopped at Wissembourg. In that quiet peaceful little town lived the former companion of Charles II, the hero of extraordinary adventures, the dethroned king, Stanislas Leczinski.

After astonishing reverses his ill-fortune had brought him on to French soil where he was protected by the friendship of Louis XV. Surrounded by a few faithful and devoted servants, he showed stoic resignation, and bore poverty, isolation and an exile's gloomy existence without complaint or protest. The Hôtel Weber, where he lived with his wife and daughter, often saw them in straitened circumstances which they accepted with truly Christian humility. The queen's jewels were in pawn with a Jewish moneylender at Frankfurt. There was no more revenue coming from Poland; only a pension paid at irregular intervals by the King of France kept him from absolute want.

At times, to beguile the boredom of long empty days, Stanislas recalled the prowess of his brilliant youth; the victories, conquests and honours in which he had had so large a part, the affection of Charles XII, the glowing colours of a short career. When he came to the throne of Poland at the age of twenty-seven he thought himself destined for the most magnificent future. Being enthusiastic,

illness of the king. Everyone disapproved, and was amazed and genuinely stupefied. Mathieu Marais notes in his *Journal*: "The French are not built to love the Polish, who are the Gascons of the North and strong republicans."

On the next day the king declared: "I shall marry the Princess of Poland. This princess, born on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1703, is the only daughter of Stanislas Leczinski, Count of Lesno, former *staroste* of Adelnau, then palatine of Posnania, later elected king of Poland in July 1704, and of Catherine Opalinski, daughter of the *castellan* of Posnania, who are both coming to take up their residence at Saint-Germain-en-Laye with the mother of King Stanislas, Anna Jablanoruska." Then, to escape the tedious formality of congratulations, the king went hunting and returned late.

He seemed satisfied and contemplated with pleasure Pierre Gobert's portrait of the princess Marie. The future queen's features, indeed, seemed attractive, sympathetic and gentle; her frank candid eyes told of a quiet, loving soul; nothing artificial, conventional or studied emanated from that virginal face. Gobert, a member of the Royal Academy since 1701 and highly esteemed at the court, had painted the Duchess of Burgundy in riding-dress, the Duke of Brittany, the Duchess of Maine and the Princess de Condé. An artist of the transition period, still paying sacrifice to the fashion of grave and pompous scenes, he still offered the foremost examples of the taste for mythological allegory, the refinements and artifice dear to Jean Raoux,

of the palace, Count de Tarlo, and the two Polish confessors at the Hôtel Weber. The artist felt the pathetic dignity of the spectacle presented by these men who clung to their sovereign, striving against adversity and preserving the memory of a vanished glory. His eyes were taken by the liveliness and grace of the princess, Marie, a ray of sunshine in these gloomy, silent surroundings. He appreciated the extent of her knowledge and the many accomplishments that improved and beautified her mind. Desirous of giving a faithful portrait of her without letting himself improve on nature through a wish to flatter, and altogether abandoning certain methods demanded by the ladies and the courtesans of Versailles, he portrayed the sparkle of youth, the fair complexion, the kind eyes; and managed to secure an almost perfect likeness. He was well aware that his portrait was to be shown to the Duc de Bourbon, at the instigation of Mme de Prie who was anxious to look after and maintain her interests.

When the canvas was finished, Stanislas wrote to the Chevalier de Vauchoux, his adviser and his agent at Court, these enthusiastic lines: "Here, my dear Vauchoux, is the portrait that I have been wanting to direct to Cardinal de Rohan; but I imagined that if you gave it, it would cause less of a stir. I beg then that you will give it to Mme de Prie with your own hands. I am convinced, in advance, of the good use she will put it to. For the rest, I leave it to Providence. You will admit that I have reason to be charmed by the workmanship

imaginative and a dreamer, and ready to fight for his claims, he had been confident of a destiny worthy of praise and envy. Then cruel and unforeseen events had come upon him, linking his ill-fortunes with those of the King of Sweden. The latter, defeated at Pultawa, lost his prestige and his power; Poland where he had established Stanislas as king took back its former sovereign Augustus II of Saxony in 1712.

Governor of the principality of the Deux-Ponts on the left bank of the Rhine, and master of a country belonging to Sweden, Stanislas Leczinski owed to his protector's generosity a situation which extenuated the bitterness of the loss of a kingdom. He still had faith in better days, when the death of Charles II, killed like a hero at the age of thirty-six, came and destroyed his hopes. Not only did he mourn a brother-in-arms, a dearly-loved friend, and a prince whose virtues reminded him of Alexander the Great; but he understood what terrible tribulations he would have to face henceforth.

After being hunted by the agents of Augustus II, who were charged to assassinate him, and chased from the Deux-Ponts, he finally found refuge in France; the Regent gave him authority to take up residence at Wissembourg and assured him of the interest he took in his misfortunes. When Pierre Gobert presented himself before this hapless sovereign he was struck by his kindness and uprightness and the tender, deferent affection he showed towards Baron de Meszeck, Grand Marshal

actions outwardly most noble, Louis XV had few illusions left. He was a farsighted sceptic, and his precocity and his intelligence destroyed the spontaneity of youth. Since his childhood he had seen all sorts of things, and had been involved in too many intrigues and passions. He had learnt to observe unceasingly, to exercise his critical faculty, to look after himself and keep himself from harm. If Mme de Ventadour and Fleury inspired him with sincere gratitude, nothing was able to take the place of a mother's understanding.

The sunlight of a great love alone could unfold the treasures of a sensitive heart; he daydreamed before the portrait of Marie and looked with a careful scrutiny at the future. On this union the course of his life partly depended; everything made him hopeful. So Villars on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1725 wrote: "The king yesterday announced his marriage; and I assure you that no-one could be brighter nor be more anxious for the princess' arrival; he has promised us that he will be a father within ten months of his marriage." The same historian adds: "The princess of Poland is nearly twenty-two years old, handsome and personally attractive; possessing moreover all the virtue, wit and intelligence that could be desired in the wife of a king who is fifteen and a half years of age."

The Duke gave the Duc d'Antin the charge of going to make the official demand; and Marquis de Beauvau went off to King Stanislas to settle the terms of the marriage. Eight ladies from the palace received orders to set out for Strasbourg

of the portrait; for you yourself will judge when you see it that it is alive, and nothing could be a better likeness. I wish, too, that her character could be drawn as you know it, it is your work and mine; believe me, with all my heart affectionately yours."

His daughter's marriage with the Duc de Bourbon, prince of the blood, first minister of the kingdom, seemed to Stanislas an unhopcd-for good fortune, and overwhelmed him with joy. After a fairly long journey the eagerly awaited portrait arrived amidst great excitement. It was no longer a question of the Duke's marriage but of Louis XV's. They were looking for a suitable match, the picture of the Polish princess came just at the right time to recall her existence.

Now the king was consulting the work of Pierre Gobert; the youth of fifteen, whose shyness of women used to astonish the Court, who had been unfeignedly glad to see the departure of the Infanta, seemed to be accepting without a tremor the idea of marrying an unknown girl; and heard Marshal de Villars sing the praises of Marie Leczinska. His heart, thirsty for love and eager to love someone who would understand him, a storehouse of unsatisfied emotions, demanded a deep affection, an affection that the world could not give him, an affection quite untouched by calculating motives, ambition or flattery. Being reflective, a merciless psychologist, accustomed to judge men according to their worth, to baffle wiles and calculations, to discern the motive of



was becoming dearer every day; at Saint-Antoine on the outskirts when a baker tried to sell his bread at too high a price, the people collected and robbed his shop; archers from the watch, foot and horse, fired on the crowd and killed a man. At Caen, a serious revolt broke out; at Lisieux and in La Maine, houses were burnt, and the rebellion took on an alarming aspect; at Rouen the duke of Luxembourg, governor of the province, was attacked in his carriage, his men wounded, and he himself obliged to flee. The parliaments of Burgundy and Brittany refused to accept the edict of the *cinquantième*; the clergy was hostile to any kind of fiscal reform.

Scarcity of wheat and lack of bread was too much for some parts of the kingdom; in August 1725 Barbier wrote sadly: "People are no longer eating rolls or soft bread at Paris." Disastrous rains, poor harvests, crushing taxes, all enraged the people; at the Court of Justice of 8<sup>th</sup> June, the demands formulated against the government of Mme de Prie and the Duke reached their zenith. The two of them were at the height of unpopularity; scurrilous charges were laid against them, and they were held responsible for all the melancholy happenings and the calamities of the times.

From her very arrival in France, Marie Leczinska found herself in a difficult and complicated situation. The people to whom she was partly indebted for her marriage, the Duc de Bourbon and the Marquise de Prie, were doing their best to win her friendship and her gratitude, in order

where they would find Marie Leczinska. The apartments at Versailles benefited from repairs and redecoration; and they were made worthy of receiving the household of the queen of France. Over these apartments still hung the melancholy memory of Marie-Thérèse, the Duchess of Burgundy, and the Great King's mistresses — the recollection of the dramas and conflicts that had been worked out in a lavish and splendid setting. Another woman yet was going to live in these panelled halls, amid these tapestries and the treasures that were witnesses of other lives, now extinguished for ever, with their train of hopes and happiness, of sadness and of suffering. For her the same vicissitudes of joy and affliction were beginning, to continue till the day when the world was to abandon her on the threshold of her tomb, the world who had murdered her.

Louis of Orleans, the first among the princes of the blood, asked in his master's name the honour of the hand of the princess of Poland; he asked one hundred thousand crowns for the expenses of the journey — a considerable sum, but necessary to dazzle the nations and emphasize the splendour of royalty.

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At the time when the most astonishing story was beginning — more like a fairy-tale where the dreams of Marie Leczinska and King Stanislas were being realized — the kingdom of France was going through an era of poverty and destitution. Bread

number of officers and attendants, a retinue of twenty-two coaches and the state carriages, slowly made their way to Alsace. It was a fine journey, capable of stirring the imagination; and the Duke's sister spared nothing that would display its magnificence and brilliance.

During the ceremony of betrothal that took place on 14<sup>th</sup> August, the people of Strasbourg showed a spontaneous gaiety and excitement; illuminations, parties, salutes of cannon-fire, and rejoicings livened the streets of the city. In the nave of the cathedral, decorated with lavishness and splendour, the marriage ceremony was performed the next day. In the midst of an eager throng Cardinal de Rohan, the Canon-counts of Strasbourg, the clergy, both secular and regular, conducted the queen from the church porch to the choir. The bells rang in full peals, the guard sounded their trumpets, while the dull beat of the drums accompanied the kettle-drums.

Moved, and a little frightened by the stares of the bystanders, the cynosure of a huge crowd, Marie Leczinska reached her place, scarcely able to check the violent beating of her heart. She humbly knelt and offered up a prayer of thanks to God. At times her eyes followed these ambassadors, masters of ceremonies and princes whose queen she was to be henceforth. Stanislas and the queen of Poland led their child to the altar; Pierre de Nolhac in a detailed description remarks on Marie Leczinska's dress, of silver brocade trimmed with silver lace and sprinkled

to combat the attacks that threatened their interests. She was led to play a dangerous part, to take up the support of a detested faction; and at once there was friction; her awkward handling of affairs irritated Louis XV; and thus arose a whole host of discord which was to compromise the happiness of their marriage.

Villars foresaw the troubles likely to assail the future queen in a period of discontent and uncertainty. Fortunately Marie never thought of them; she was full of joy from the moment she heard the astonishing news of her marriage. Pierre de Nolhac wrote à propos of this: "The king entered the room where the two women were, his face radiant with unusual joy, a letter in his hand: "Ah, daughter," he cried, "let us fall on our knees and thank God!" "What, father, are you to be recalled to the throne?" "Heaven has been still kinder to us; you are queen of France!" Father mother and daughter embraced one another with tears, and knelt to welcome with grateful prayers the news which put an end to the wretched uncertainty of their fortunes." In residence at Strasbourg where they were welcomed by the lavish hospitality of the Countess d'Andlau, Stanislas and his family knew a period of undiluted prosperity. The Duc d'Antin, the Duke of Orleans, the ambassadors of France, the princes of Alsace and the Rhine, came eager to lay their homage at their feet. Mlle de Clermont having left Paris on 25<sup>th</sup> July with Mmes de Boufflers and de Mailly, the seven maids of honour of the queen, a large

knees before him when he raised her and kissed her several times; he seemed unusually good humoured and was brimful of youth and life. The public remarked on his frank easy charm. The descriptions and portraits of the king of France seemed to the young Polish girl far inferior to reality; she admired the regularity of his features, the fascinating brilliance of his eyes, his graceful manners, and the majesty of a presence really natural, unaffected and without conceit. She gave in to her feelings, for her dearest hopes had been surpassed, and she could not hide her joy.

After introducing the princesses of the blood, Louis XV led her back to her carriage; he took his seat in it in company with the Duchess of Orleans, the Duchess de Bourbon, the Princesse de Conti and Mlle de Charolais. His animated conversation, his amusing sallies engendered real gaiety; he put himself out to entertain; and he rarely showed himself as confident or as unreserved.

The castle of the de Rohan at Moret gave shelter to the queen and her retinue for the night, while the sovereign went back to Fontainebleau where the marriage ceremony was repeated the next day. A ceremony full of pomp, such as would tempt the brush of a Rubens or a Titian. The chapel doors were covered with blue velvet with the arms of France set thereon; the choir was spread with a wonderful Persian carpet; nothing was spared that could present a striking picture of the wealth of the Court of France.

with roses and artificial flowers; he shows the Duke of Orleans taking the place of Louis XV, kneeling beside her during the nuptial blessing.

Then mounting her carriage again, surrounded by the hundred Swiss guards and the bodyguard, the Queen of France returned to the palace of the Government; and the first episode of her extraordinary adventure was ended.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August she went from Strasbourg, leaving her parents with regret; at Metz a splendid reception was in store for her. Then she went through Verdun, Clermont, Rheims, Châlons and Provins. Everywhere acclamation, cheers and ardent loyalty greeted her, and so she learned to know a country which was to be her own.

Marie tirelessly bent herself to the necessities of a convention that she was taught by Mlle de Clermont, M. de Nagis, her knight of honour, M. de Tessé, her first squire, and the ladies of her household. She showed neither pride nor vanity, but sweetness and meekness. The Duc de Mortemart gave her a picture of Louis XV adorned with diamonds — an inestimable gift which delighted her. From her childhood she had heard the praises of the king's beauty, his grace and his elegance; she was very glad to possess a picture that she adorned with all the virtues.

On the afternoon of 4<sup>th</sup> September, the two young people met not far from Moret. This meeting, so often described by the memoir-writers of the period, testifies to Louis XV's eagerness and pleasure. Marie had scarcely fallen on her

Writing to his friend Lebret the Marshal gives revealing details: "The night of 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> was one of the most glorious for our young king; and you can rest assured that the most enterprising of the Cadets of Aix have never made themselves famous for greater exploits, or in fact such surprising ones; the night of 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> was almost the same. The king as you believe is very pleased with himself and the queen, who indeed is certainly queen in every way." For his part Mathieu Marais notes in his Journal: "I have letters from Fontainebleau telling me that since his marriage the king has been gay, talkative and eager, that the queen is charming, she has a pretty face and a lovely gracious voice; and that she never has a minute's rest."

The most reliable witnesses and those most worthy of credence are positive about the sincerity of Louis XV's love. A *mariage de convenance* planned by interested parties, uniting two people who did not know one another, who were ill-matched in age, and brought up according to widely different principles, took to itself the radiance and the grace of love — spontaneous on the part of Louis XV, deep and reflective on the part of Marie Leczinska. If its duration was short the king should not be held responsible; he had every excuse in the eyes of posterity. The severest historians almost completely absolve him; the Church alone cannot countenance a serious transgression of the Commandments; still, even the Church felt that a king of fifteen was entitled to some leniency. Physical and moral incompatibilities

A dense crowd of the highest dignitaries, the most illustrious nobles, the most eminent names in the Army and the Church packed every corner. The marriage ceremony, the High Chaplain's sermon, the necessity of performing the civil ceremony took up long hours; the stifling atmosphere, heavy with incense, with no possibility of ventilation was overpowering; so Marie fainted for a few minutes, then painfully overcame her weariness and weakness. Finally everyone set his signature on the parish register at Fontainebleau, the *Te Deum* rang out in a paeon of joy; then, after a last prayer for the king, the chapel emptied. Most of the spectators took away with them a valuable memento, consisting of a medallion celebrating the union of Louis XV and Marie Leczinska, a union that seemed to promise a radiant future.

The great banquet, the distribution of presents to the princesses of the blood and to the ladies of the palace, the theatre, the supper, the fireworks, and illuminations delayed the moment that was to unite the husband and wife. Villars describes the last events of that memorable day thus: "The king after he had been in bed a few moments went to the queen's room followed by the Duke, the first nobleman of the Bedchamber, the Grand Master of the Wardrobe and Marshal Villars. Everyone went out then. The Duke and Villars the next day, a little while after the king had gone, entered the room of the queen, who was still in bed, and paid her their compliments."



economy, asked her to show herself French at heart, and to keep the king on the narrow path; a difficult task, with many a reef and danger through which Marie, for all her good intentions, could not steer. A consciousness of filial duty prevailed in the queen's heart; on the afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup> September Stanislas Leczinski arrived at the Château de Bouron. The King of Poland was received by Villars when he dismounted and he embraced him and thanked him for his services; then he held his daughter in a long embrace, unable to express adequately his great happiness. On 16<sup>th</sup>, Louis XV visited his wife's parents and bestowed on them every possible sign of his respect and his friendship. His conversation, so Villars recalls, was freer and easier than anyone could have expected; he talked a lot and without constraint of self-consciousness; a dinner concluded the interview and the guests parted very pleased with one another. Marie had never felt so happy; her husband's affectionate deference to those she dearly cherished filled her with joy; and she was pleased with him for conduct which could only add to her gratitude.

Being appreciative of literature and the arts, and loving the conversation of the well-informed, and herself open-minded, the queen's interests were many and varied. She was well able to judge a picture, piece of sculpture or a monument and to discern the merits of a book of history or philosophy; she could justify her opinions, and she continually strove to widen her knowledge in

little by little turned Louis XV from his duty. Later on I shall recall the chief reasons for this estrangement.

On 6<sup>th</sup> September, Marie was walking in the Jardin de Diane, still bewildered by all her good fortune, having passed from a sober, retired, colourless existence to a worldly life that brought her out into the lime-light. She was talking with Villars whose advice she valued and whom she admired. He was a friend of her father's who had known Charles XII and was one of those who had arranged her marriage. So she owed him deep gratitude, asked his company and learned from his lips all the news of the Court. Conscious of the part he could play with this timid inexperienced queen, he did his best to warn her against the perils about her, and gave her wise advice.

His memoirs contain the faithful account of one of their interviews. Here it is: — "Madame, there is general satisfaction about your marriage and the way it has begun; and everyone who knows the great qualities you possess wants you to use your sovereignty over the mind of the king. You will win still more admiration from the public if you are willing to let yourself realize that the generosity and liberality that you indulge in so joyfully is troubled only when you think that all that you give to the French comes from the French, and that you are drawing all the benefits you so lavishly confer from a nation that you would like to see wealthier."

He continually urged her towards prudence and

Marie Leczinska lost the advantages of a first love.

Louis XV was not slow to notice the age of his companion; he soon grew bored with her; when her physical attractions began to lose their power, after she had borne ten children, very many temptations came from elsewhere to beguile him and to turn him from his obligations as a husband.

If Marie had had the foresight and magnificent intelligence of a Pompadour she would have succeeded in holding the king, and in keeping him safe from guilty and forbidden loves. Though she was only the king's mistress, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson excelled in distracting him by her witty and amusing tongue, and in beguiling his melancholy and turning the course of his thoughts. Marie was incapable of taking on that part.

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Writing to his daughter a little while after the marriage, Stanislas Leczinski said: "You should not confide in anyone but the king your husband. He should be the sole keeper of your feelings, your desires and your plans, and all your thoughts; imprudence lets out secrets and friendship confides them; love, true love gives them up without even being aware of it. Never try, though, to pierce the veils which cover the secrets of the State; authority never requires a companion. Respond to the king's hopes with all the attentions of which you are capable. You should no longer think otherwise than with him and as he thinks, nor

subjects which seemed little capable of absorbing her attention.

Plunged into the midst of a brilliant Court where men of high worth were gathered together, queen of a people whose aesthetic treasures were countless, she had the intelligence to complete her education and to raise herself as far as possible in the realm of intellect. From the very first the habits of those about her disturbed her; she was frightened by the immorality of customs inherited from the Regency and the preceding reign; she shuddered at the impiety of certain great lords, their love of gambling, their passion for feasts and amusements, their intrigues and their wretched jealousies. Very often she was unable to hide her disapproval; she lacked the facility and diplomacy of a Duchess of Burgundy. A foreigner she remained to the end, despite her efforts; matured by an unhappy sequence of events and accustomed to retire into herself and to think deeply, she never seemed frivolous or gay; she took on far too soon the appearance of dignity and reserve; like many women she was a good and attentive mother, and let girlish ingenuousness and charm die within her too soon.

To captivate Louis XV it would have been necessary to preserve for a long time an extremely youthful outlook, a heedless vivacity, and to distract him and surround him with an atmosphere of gaiety. This child-king whose heart was still so unformed dreamed of the pleasures of life; and for want of sufficiently supplying them

freedom, he gave his advice, and fulfilled the heaviest duties of the Court. But the Duke, infuriated by such a supervision, resolved to shake it off and to employ the queen to his interests.

On 18th December 1725, as Louis XV was talking with Fleury, Marie Leczinska sent the Marquis de Nangis to request the king to come to her apartments. Louis XV on going out said to the Bishop that he would return in a few minutes. After waiting two hours, Fleury went away in a very bad humour guessing that something against his interests was brewing; he learned for certain the next day when he heard that the king had had private audiences with the Duc de Bourbon; he wrote a cautious letter to Louis XV, charged Niert with its delivery and left the Court.

Villars tells of the painful impression made on the king's mind by this letter. Scarcely had he received it when he shut himself in his room for an hour lost in the gloomiest reflections, decided that Fleury must return at once, and resolved to stand by him. An express command handed to the Duke forced him to the recall of his enemy. The Bishop eagerly welcomed saw his credit strengthened; from now on no-one could handle a State matter before the king without his presence.

The shrewd diplomat could not fail to be aware that the Duke had hoped to ruin him by handing to Louis XV a letter from Cardinal de Polignac full of odious charges against him. He could not be unaware of the queen's assent, and her alarm when the king had handed back the letter without

feel any joys and griefs than those that touch him nearly, nor know other ambitions than to please him, nor other pleasures than to obey him, nor other concern than to deserve his affection. You ought, in a word, to have no mood nor inclination; your soul should lose itself in his."

Her father's foresight fixed a rule of life which unfortunately could not be put into practice; the king's and queen's intimacy remained physical rather than moral. Marie never succeeded in really understanding the character of Louis XV; no lasting bond of trust was formed between them; intellectual contact did not kindle any sparks of common sympathy. With no-one to advise her, and bound by gratitude to the Duc de Bourbon and Mme de Prie, hostile to Fleury, the queen made a dangerous error from the very first months of her coming to Versailles. She committed the fault of meddling in affairs of State, in spite of the wise advice of King Stanislaus.

The former tutor of Louis XV, and high in his esteem and confidence, Fleury watched the state directed, leaving to the Duke the title of Prime Minister; his former experience toned down the impulsive reactions of a prince of the blood who was too young and too quick to anger. Fearing the harm of a friendship between the sovereign and the Duc de Bourbon, he was present at all their interviews, having adopted the practice of making his way into the study half an hour before the minister and being present at consultations and at work. If he gave him a certain amount of

"It's not my fault"; and she got nothing from that diplomat, who hid under a mild and respectful exterior a strong and tenacious will.

Louis XV in giving full support to the wishes of Fleury worked for the good of France and rendered immense service to the country; this the future proved in a striking manner. His keen intuition kept him on the right track; in 1726 the old Bishop de Fréjus alone was able to direct the interests of the kingdom, maintain peace, build up its finances, and secure the prestige of the whole nation. And always through the ambition of this delicate feeble old man, who was worn out by years of toil, could be felt his consciousness of the immediate responsibility towards a monarch too young to act of his own accord, and his feeling that he must devote the last of his strength to the service of France and show a devotion that was unlimited. Resolved then to get the Duc de Bourbon out of the way, with the full assent of Louis XV Fleury watched for a favorable opportunity and frustrated his enemies' schemes and attacks.

In June 1726 Villars speaking to Dodun, the Controller General, confided to him: "I can see a storm threatening the Duke; and I think it is on the point of breaking." Dodun replied: "I do not think he will still be in his position in three months time." Then the Marshal cried: "Not in eight hours, I think!" That conversation took place on 8th June; a little while afterwards the courtiers saw the Duc de Mortemart, a deadly enemy of the Duc

saying a word and showing his disapproval. Fleury appreciated the full extent of his former pupil's friendship, he even was glad of Marie's hostility; for he rejoiced in a victory over the Prime Minister and the king's wife. An important victory in his eyes, a victory ill-omened for Marie Leczinska; having supported a person whom Louis XV disapproved, and having sought to humiliate the only man whose credit was high, she had made herself the spokesman of a hated party and had involved herself in what did not concern her in the least.

Pierre de Nolhac writes: "A great change was seen in the mind of the young husband after he had seen his wife used as an instrument in the hands of the enemies of M. de Fréjus (Fleury). The new coldness which was the result he extended even to the marriage chamber, in hours when usually his ardour had all the fire of youth. The young wife was grieved at this disapproval." In the spring of 1726 the bonds of friendship were strained still more, and the queen was the cause of it, in spite of the best intentions and the most laudable desires in the world; she took the advice of her Polish confessor, Abbé Labirewski, instead of consulting her own heart.

A clumsy attempt with Fleury had no effect; in vain she tried to appease a man cruelly offended; but the prelate's resistance grieved and frightened her; and she saw the gravity of her position. As she confided to the bishop her fears about the king's coldness towards her, he replied dryly:



Louis XV's orders expressed as follows: "I order you, under pain of disobedience, to go to Chantilly and to stay there till further orders."

Disconcerted and thoroughly amazed and alarmed the Prime Minister replied: "Being accustomed to make others obey the king I shall give an example of obedience; but I did not deserve that harshness." Forthwith he left Versailles followed by Saint-Paul, the lieutenant of the body-guard. In the evening when she heard the news Marie Leczinska burst into tears; she sobbed for a long time moved by a disgrace which struck very near home and made her compare her weakness in influencing the king with Fleury's strength. The latter sent the poor queen a letter from Louis XV in the following terms: "I beg you, Madame, — if necessary I order you — to give credit to all that the old Bishop de Fréjus tells you on my behalf, just as if he were myself." Villars notes that she could not restrain her tears in the prelate's presence; the severe and imperious tone of the letter, the fact, even, that it was delivered by an enemy finished by making her unhappy and anxious.

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The public were loud in their rejoicings at the exile of the Duc de Bourbon, Mme de Prie and the Pâris brothers; for it seemed as if an era of poverty and misfortune was coming to an end; songs, pamphlets and comedies greeted the departure of a despised party. Barbier tells in his "Journal", that

de Bourbon and a great favorite of Louis XV, conversing with Marshal d'Huxelles, Fleury and the Duc de Charost; there was a general feeling that the *dénouement* was at hand. The king, in fact, decided to act without delay; his looks and his behaviour gave no inkling of his cold-blooded resolution; he spoke amiably and without reserve to the Prime Minister. At the moment when he was about to strike no-one must catch any sign that would reveal his thoughts. Extraordinary prudence on the part of a youth of sixteen, a prudence that was to remain one of his most curious traits. Many historians have read into it a faculty for loathsome dissimulation, and culpable Machiavellism; it is fairer to believe in it a perfect understanding of the demands of court life and the rôle of king.

Never did any man or woman succeed in reading the king's thoughts in his face; and no gesture, attitude or impulsive reaction allowed men to guess what he was planning. Louis XV did not react violently as his grand-father and his father did, but when he was thought to be inclining towards clemency and forgetfulness, his anger revealed itself with an abruptness that was disconcerting and astonishing.

At three in the afternoon he mounted his horse and said to the Duc de Bourbon: "Do not wait supper for me," then he set out for Rambouillet; at seven o'clock, Charost who, had been given strict orders, asked to speak with the Duke and addressing him in insulting terms gave him

an atmosphere of frivolity and idleness; nothing seems further from the actual facts.

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Such was the devotion of the French to their king that it was with emotion they learned of a short illness sustained on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1726. But it was a harmless ailment caused by too lavish a diet, and an existence that would have wearied the best constitution in the world; fortunately three bleedings saved the monarch. Paris showed a spontaneous joy, the Duc de Gesvres had a display of fireworks; but the anguish caused by an event which could have had grave consequences was felt again in 1742 more severely and with more reason.

Scarcely were the rejoicings over, and scarcely had Parliament offered up a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving when Marie Leczinska fell ill; for three days she hovered between life and death; dismayed doctors hastened to her bedside, a confessor administered to her the last sacrament; and prayers were made everywhere to Heaven to save her. Everyone feared small-pox; Louis XV did not enter her room for four days; the courtiers passed on the most disquieting rumours; but they were not fulfilled, and the queen began to recover. Stanislas Leczinska reveals in a letter the cause of this illness: Marie had eaten one hundred and eighty oysters and drunk four glasses of beer; her excesses at table upset a sound constitution; besides, moderation and restraint were unknown

placards were posted on the walls of Paris bearing the following inscription: "One hundred pistoles reward to the man who finds a valuable mare accustomed to follow a one-eyed horse." A coarse allusion to the Prime Minister, who had lost an eye, and his mistress.

When the king announced the abolition of the position of Prime Minister and his wish to govern by himself, the joy seemed unanimous and sincere. At the first council held after the exile of the Duc de Bourbon Louis XV expressed his happiness in following once more the principles of the Great King; he trusted that he would allot hours to all the ministers to work with him in the presence of Fleury, who had become absolute master of the fate of the kingdom at the age of seventy-six.

This power, so passionately desired and acquired by means of so much intrigue, the Bishop was to use with wisdom, moderation and intelligence. France rarely had a better diplomat at her head, or a pilot as conscious of his charges and his responsibilities. Till 1743 Fleury performed a useful and beneficial work, he reduced taxes, put finance on a sound basis, gave Stanislas Leczinski the duchies of Lorraine and Bar, acted prudently in the War of the Austrian Succession, and took care of our armies, not sacrificing them to vain bravado, glorious but weakening. A false legend spread wantonly shows Fleury as one who took the king from affairs of State, concealed from him the duties of his position and surrounded him with

## Chapter IV

# INITIATION AS A POLITICIAN AND THE AWAKENING OF HIS PASSIONS (1726—1733)

THE protection of Mme de Prie had given the Viennese embassy to the Duc de Richelieu in 1724. Contrary to the expectations of the informed, this frivolous, licentious, proud noble had shown himself to be a skilful diplomat. Swift to baffle the hostility of Philip V and his envoy, Baron Ripperda, to demand the rights of France on all occasions, and to form useful ties with the ministers of Charles VI and the representatives of England, he carried out perfectly orders from Paris. Fleury, who had ratified his appointment, appreciated merits whose effects seemed singularly opportune. Richelieu after winning the sympathy of the Comte de Zinsendorff, Chancellor of the Empire, hoped to ruin the prospect of an alliance between Charles VI and Philip V — an alliance directed against France; he wanted to prevent a coalition between Austria and Spain.

The gravest cares did not make him forget his pleasures and his parties; his lavish extravagance was dazzling; the refinement and delicacy of his manners proved most attractive; the ladies of Vienna like those of Paris could not escape his fascinating glance nor the charm of his person.

at the Court of Versailles. Whether it was timidity or indifference, Louis paid short visits to his wife, never went alone, but always with Fleury, and left for Fontainebleau before she was completely recovered; which caused slanderous tongues to talk.

Nothing could have done more to strengthen his position with the new cardinal and Louis XV; the latter sent him on 21<sup>st</sup> September a letter of thanks full of the most flattering and most valuable tokens of friendship. Already the conclusion of the Treaty of Vienna, on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1727, had shown the talents of the young diplomat; so the king's welcome was cordial when Richelieu returned to Court on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1728; he was to benefit from a privileged position and to enjoy signal honours.

The political horizon once cleared of the black clouds which overhung it, and the immediate danger of a foreign war averted, everyone regained confidence when they saw Fleury guiding the kingdom with a firm steady hand. Moreover Spain was seeking a reconciliation with France; on 3<sup>rd</sup> August the papal legate to Madrid had sent to Versailles a letter from the Marquis de la Paz, a letter written at the orders of Philip V to be shown to Louis XV. In it Philip V announced the birth of the child Louis and set down his wish for a rapprochement, expressing himself without bitterness in tender and affectionate terms. Louis responded immediately to this first step towards better relations between the two countries; relations became less strained, to everyone's satisfaction; and the happy news was greeted by popular rejoicings.

His mind precociously mature, the great-grandson of the Roi-Soleil showed an unceasing interest in affairs of State. When he was present at Councils he rarely spoke, but he listened and took everything

President Hénault said of him: "He is the luckiest man of the century; he has vanquished all the women — so much so that one can pick out those who have resisted his charms." Mme de Gontaut called the ambassador "Fanfarinet" after a man in a fairy-tale, famous for his adventures in love; Paul d'Estrée quotes the charming lines that she aimed at him after a dramatic rupture:

*Ton amour n'est que badinage;  
Tes serments sont un persiflage,  
Que tu prodigues à chaque instant,  
À tout objet qui se présente,  
Sans choix, sans goût, ni sentiment,  
Il te suffit d'en tromper trente.*

How could be better portrayed the feats of this Don Juan, whose successful exploits were countless, whose vice was triumphant, whose immorality marked by unheard-of audacity.

In 1726 Richelieu interposed to obtain the Emperor's consent to Fleury's promotion as cardinal before the expected time. Having obtained it he wrote to Voltaire on 2<sup>nd</sup> September: "I have only time to write you a few words; but I could not delay for a moment the good news I am sending the King, of how I have at last dragged from the Emperor his consent to the promotion of M. de Fréjus. I sent it to Rome yesterday, to Cardinal de Polignac by special messenger. I am overcome with delight at this, for I can tell you without boasting that I have managed it skilfully, and I believe that I am putting some people under a certain obligation to me."



feared he might be using up his strength; and Villars said to him: "Sire, Louis XIII died at the age of forty-two from just such over-exertion."

A tragic event occurred to sadden the Court on 10th August 1727. While at Fontainebleu the king was amusing himself with a bow and arrows; and inadvertently he hit the provost-marshal, who died shortly afterwards. Four days later Marie Leczinska gave birth to twin girls; they were baptised under the names of Marie-Louise-Elizabeth and Anne-Henriette; afterwards they were called Madame Première and Madame Seconde. The young father of seventeen and a half was very proud of his effort, and showed it; he used to contemplate the two babies with joy, show them to everyone, hold them in his arms, and could hardly persuade himself to leave them; and he received congratulations with undisguised pleasure.

On the afternoon of 15th, Villars went to the king as he was rising from table; he found him in company with the Duc de Gesvres, and congratulated him on the birth of his daughters. The marshal joked about the merits of a husband when his wife had twins; and he conversed for a long time in a jesting, familiar tone; rarely had Louis seemed wittier or more high-spirited.

His friendship with the queen was renewed. Marie Leczinska was overwhelmed with attention; he supped in her company, and was more often at her side. The courtiers looked on at a reconciliation at which many congratulated themselves. To please his wife Louis went off to the Château de

in; he learned and recorded in his mind; — a period of incubation whose results were to unfold some years later.

Through his horror of death and suffering he feared war and applauded the efforts of those who sought to avert it by pacific measures; through an innate feeling for the grandeur of his mission, a mission both human and divine, he considered himself responsible for the country's destiny, and he acted with discernment and without passion or recklessness.

The Treaty of Vienna met with his approval; Fleury's policy of temporization and reflection had his full sympathy, for he realized the uselessness of competition with Spain. What has been taken for fatuity, lack of feeling, and pride, is rather an understanding of his rôle in a strongly hierarchical state, an understanding Louis XVI lacked and which led him to the scaffold. In political matters Louis XV rarely let himself be influenced by public opinion or by his advisers; when he yielded to the insistence of Mme de Pompadour and Mme du Barry he did so almost always from a full understanding of the matter; without which the country must have suffered.

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Attracted by the shady depths of the Forêt de Rambouillet, Louis XV hunted there twice a week; leaving in the morning he would return about eleven at night overcome with weariness and intoxicated by the air and exercise. His intimates

humour. When he was wounded in the knee and led a life of forced inactivity, he used to spend long hours listening to the Marshal de Villars tell of his military exploits and certain of his adventures in love; and he did not turn a hair at a freedom of language that would have been too much for many Frenchmen of the twentieth century.

The Court, outwardly circumspect, used to hear the most outspoken conversations where everything was called by its name; the Princess Palatine with her ill-chosen frankness was no exception; indeed the grossness and crudity of language was a link with the tradition of Rabelais. Barbier humorously relates an incident between the Duchess de Gontaut-Biron and Mme de Rupelmonde, both ladies of honour to Marie Leczinska. In the course of an official ceremony, the Duchess de Gontaut-Biron with an affected air tried to push in front of Mme de Rupelmonde; the latter caught hold of her arm, and then nasty looks were the prelude to a violent dispute with unsparing use of the coarsest language. One should not expect from this refined and elegant nobility, that gravitated towards Versailles, a restraint of language that they had not, nor ask of them a purity of morals that was quite beyond their knowledge.

Set in such an environment it is a wonder to see how Louis XV kept free from its taint and preserved a chaste and circumspect attitude right up till his twenty-second year. The last months of the year 1727 were marked by the return of the Duc de Bourbon; the queen rejoiced in a

Chailly owned by M. de Squiddy; there he met Villars, Charost and Stanislas Leczinski; his good-humour and delightful manners charmed the old king of Poland. However Peira, the queen's doctor, forbade all marital intercourse for several months; he feared excess of fatigue and advised a temporary separation. Louis XV's advisers revolted against such orders. To leave a lusty and ardent young man without his wife seemed a dangerous thing. Fleury overruling Peira's warning advised bringing the queen to Fontainebleau; although he had no doubts about the virtue of his former pupil, he thought it unwise to tempt him.

Truly there was no lack of temptations in this Versailles peopled with ravishing and willing beauties. Since 1725 how many young and far from timid nymphs had tried without success to win the heart and beguile the senses of the monarch! how many tricks and wiles had gone for nothing, how many enticing glances and allurements had met with coldness and severity!

One day when the Duc de Béthune was with the Marshal de Villars, Louis XV and Pezé, the latter said to him: "If you found yourself with Mme de Gontaut and she was ready to give you everything, you would not be tempted?" Béthune, a very devout man, replied: "I should run away." And the king thoroughly approved of his resolution.

There was nothing narrow-minded nor prudish about this discreet, sensible ruler whose virtues were so like his father's; he was by no means averse from spicy tales, love stories and broad

awakened once more owing to his becoming too physically fatigued, over-indulging in extraordinary meals, and then catching a chill while sleigh-racing.

Finally the wishes of every Frenchman were realized on 4<sup>th</sup> September with the coming into the world of the Dauphin Louis. The birth of a son of France was greeted by illuminations, bonfires, the closing of all shops, popular rejoicings, and magnificent ceremonials; for sixty-eight years there had not been a direct heir, so archives had to be consulted for conventional procedure on such occasions. The aldermen of Paris lit up their houses with chandeliers and brilliant lanterns, and set casks full of wine and Bologna sausages and small loaves before their doors.

At the height of bliss Louis XV went from Versailles to Paris, took part in a solemn *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame, then went to the Hôtel de Ville where the municipality showed their attachment to their king by a fine display of fireworks, and a banquet. He, at about half past one in the morning, crossed the Rue des Lombards, reached the Rue de la Ferronnerie and the Rue Saint-Honoré, admired the illuminations of the Place Vendôme, and took the road for Versailles, very pleased with the welcome given by his good capital.

However there still remained many subjects for anxiety; the religious disputes were far from being settled; there was a continually recurrent animosity to the Jansenites and Jesuits; and the public were violently partizan. Pamphlets and party songs stirred up an antagonistic spirit; philosophers and

justifiably clement measure; Louis XV seemed happy to see again a hunting companion. He followed again the Chantilly road for whose scenery he had a real predilection.

In his journal, Mathieu Marais notes that the only question at this period was the verse of Voltaire: "the air," he writes, "is full of satires reeking of the Bastille"; he wonders likewise at the continued progress of arts and letters and the pastels of Quentin La Tour, and the paintings of François Boucher and Nattier; he praises in fitting terms an aestheticism illustrated with such exquisite charm.

Villars, preoccupied with political and social questions, in his *Memoirs* studies the king's progress in affairs of State; he notes that on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1727 Louis XV offered his advice to the Council of Despatches and congratulated it on its competence.

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On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1727 was born the third of the king's daughters, Louise-Marie; she was to die on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1733. The Court had been disappointed in their hopes of a Dauphin — they had even proclaimed a new heir to the throne. A philosopher, the king merely said to Marie Leczinska: "Speak to Peira (the accoucheur) about a boy." Four months after, Louis XV took to his bed; he had caught smallpox; Versailles and Paris were disturbed by grave alarms, which were dissipated however by his rapid recovery. At the beginning of 1729 their fears about the king's health were

of the propositions in the book of Father Quesnel, priest of the Oratory and a Jansenist, it immediately caused extreme agitation and stirred up endless troubles.

The Jansenist parliament took sides against the Jesuit's decree and the Pope's decision. Political opinion was divided into two rival factions, and political dissension was bound up with religious dissension and made the struggle more bitter. François of Paris, a Jansenist deacon, opposed the *Unigenitus* Bull; and he attracted fanatical supporters by his piety and charity and his renunciation of worldly goods. After his death miracles were alleged to have taken place at his tomb in the cemetery of Saint-Médard; and his disciples' zeal was carried to its height by astonishing healings and scandalous scenes.

Faced by the extravagances of the "Convulsionists" and orgies of black magic, the Church amid protestations and complaints closed the cemetery. A poet stuck the following epigram on the cemetery gate:

*De par le roi, défense à Dieu  
De faire miracle en ce lieu.*

Louis XV's and his ministers' attitude was always cautious; they strove to reconcile and appease, and show an impartial indulgence, and refused to take up the claims of the Jesuits against the Jansenists. Between the authority of the Pope, which was upheld throughout the kingdom by the Company of Jesus, and the Jansenist circles whose

free-thinkers were already raising the standard of revolution, and timidly demanding certain liberties in thought, writing, and speech.

Exposed to the attacks of numerous adversaries, the Company of Jesus was not popular; though the Fathers educated more than five hundred scholars in their different colleges, and though it was necessary for a pupil to reserve a place a year ahead, satires and lampoons gave them no mercy. When they announced the performance of a play in 1729, wits stuck a bill on the walls of their establishment running thus: "The Regular Comedians of the Pope are representing today in their theatre in Rue Saint-Jacques *Les Fourberies d'Ignace*, and, as curtain-raiser, *Arléquin Jésuite*." Mere pin-pricks which foretold the gravest conflicts; Louis XV's reign like Louis XIV's was to be poisoned by religious dissension; Court, Parliament and public opinion flung themselves into the conflict with terrible violence.

When the charming Adrienne Lecouvreur, the interpreter of the drama of Racine and the mistress of the Marshal de Saxe, died at the age of thirty-five, the curate of Saint-Sulpice refused permission to bury her in the cemetery; a special order had to be obtained from the head of the police to compel him to allow it. Customs had progressed, and such severity seemed odious and gave subject for sarcasm on the part of enemies of Religion. In 1713, in answer to the demand of the bishops of France, Clement XI had given out the famous Bull *Unigenitus*. While condemning a hundred and one



away what the centuries had laboured to fulfil. At times Louis XV's ministers and friends felt the ground tremble beneath them and heard the rattle of blows that fell without respite. At times they roused themselves and tried to exorcise the evil, establishing frail dykes, and stopping for a time the progress of destruction from within; sometimes they passively accepted an inevitable situation, rejecting the remedies prescribed by common sense and prudence. For his part, the king who had never said "*après moi le déluge*", whose alert mind and natural pessimism could discern the real dangers, was under no illusion as to the state of the kingdom; he tried to improve it, many of his attempts succeeding.

A sincere belief in the divine nature of his mission, unmingled admiration for Louis XIV's life and works, the wish to preserve in their entirety all the prerogatives of royalty, and to yield nothing to the demands of Parliament and public opinion, allowed him to maintain an authority that so many forces were combining to destroy wantonly. On 17<sup>th</sup> March 1730 Louis XV approved the nomination of Philibert Orry de Vignory as controller of Finance in place of M. le Pelletier-Desforts. An able financier, this eminent man succeeded in restoring a tax of ten per cent, reorganizing the India Company, stimulating trade with Spain, Portugal and the Echelles du Levant, and protecting artists and writers. For fifteen years Orry held one of the highest posts, with marvellous success. There was little change in the personnel of the govern-

claims were pushed by Parliament, royal power had to hold the balance as long as possible.

The clan of philosophers scoffed at both sides, denouncing their intolerance, and clamouring for reforms — reforms of custom and privilege, taxes and abuses — reforms that inquired deeply into life and conduct.

Forced into a continual game of balance and counterbalance, Louis XV found himself obliged to compel Parliament to accept the *Unigenitus* Bull; that was the price he paid for religious peace. Halfway through the century he sacrificed the Company of Jesus to the magistrates in just the same way; thus obtaining the financial help he required. Cardinal Fleury had developed a certain piety in his heart; and the young king suffered much from quarrels that troubled the peace of conscience and soul. He was surrounded by some remarkable Jesuits, he appreciated their virtues; and he likewise recognized the worth of certain Jansenists; nevertheless he already distrusted the magistrates; no natural sympathy drew him towards these austere, conceited faultfinders, the jealous guardians of the prerogatives of a select caste entitled to all the privileges.

Amidst the din of religious struggles, after 1729 could be heard the distant roar of the waves that beat against the high cliffs of royal absolutism, sapping and undermining the structure of a thousand years — a work of erosion completed in 1789, when the thousand-year-old walls fell with a crash, and a surging resistless torrent swept

struck an officer with his stick; the officer came up, took aim at him with the pistol and then exclaimed: "No-one can avenge me but myself." A few moments after he shot himself through the head.

The opposition between the two monarchs increased, and a deep abyss separated them; already the first signs of the subversion of alliances were appearing over the horizon. In his consciousness of duty, and with prerogatives already powerful, Louis XV never acted as a despot or an autocrat; he disapproved of any attack on the rights of the people, or act of brutality; the inheritor of customs and laws enacted by many generations, he insisted on their maintenance in their integrity. Slandorous pamphlets worried him not at all; he scorned them and did not stoop to prosecute them; up till 1732 gazettes and mouth-to-mouth rumours spared him; his youth, the rectitude of his private life, the fulfilment of his duties, still preserved him from the mud that was later to be cast on his name.

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Speaking of the King, Marie Leczinska said: "He has never been loved as I love him." Louis XV, when presented with a ravishingly lovely woman, exclaimed: "The Queen is still more beautiful!" Mlle de Charolais' attempts to lead her cousin astray were unprofitable; the suppers at the Château de Madrid and the balls at the Opéra left the king quite unmoved. Still Barbier notes that after a trip to Fontainebleau the king was noticed to be dreamy and absent-minded; and gossips

ment, the same people held their positions for a long time; if the king sacrificed several valuable men to the caprices of his favorites and the court intrigues, he meticulously preserved the permanence of ministers and holders of important posts. Fearing new faces, Louis XV remained faithful to the bonds of custom.

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One evening after supper, the Prince de Rohan and Villars, conversing with the king, spoke familiarly about war and amusement. Louis said abruptly to the marshal: "You have often caused trouble to many people — enemies, when you have vanquished them, — and no-one has given them more trouble than you." Flattering words that gave the glorious soldier great pleasure and assured his credit at Court.

When he dined with the queen, Louis XV took a delight in scintillating and malicious wit; the Ducs de Luynes and de Cröy have described the delightful intimacy of these family reunions. Protected from indiscreet and curious eyes the monarch gave free reign to his heedlessly impulsive nature; he never seemed so responsive or so free from affectation and constraint as in these hours. In time a certain brusqueness of manner disappeared; in 1731 the courtiers were appreciative of their sovereign's good nature and moderation, which formed a contrast with the manners of Frederick II whose exploits were famed throughout Europe. Once at a revue of troops the King of Prussia

the Nesle sisters, and numbers of others laid siege to his heart, which remained miraculously pure; for a long time they tried in vain. Scrupulous piety, a real attachment to Marie Leczinska, love of family and children, fear of sin, prevented the king from weakening and preserved him yet a while. Frequent trips from one castle to another, a taste for change and for exercise, a need of strenuous activity turned him aside from temptations that multiplied fast around him.

Faithful to his conjugal duties he never deserted the queen; on 30th August 1730 a Duke of Anjou was born; but he died at the age of three. The news of his death was announced to Marie Leczinska in a tragic manner. Seeing a porter coming from the Duke of Anjou's room pass her balcony she asked him how the prince was. Not knowing who she was the porter naturally replied that he was dead. At this news the queen with a cry of grief fainted away. Less than two years later a fourth daughter came into the world, — Marie-Adelaide, on 23rd March 1732. After her birth Marie Leczinska, worn out with bearing so many children in so short a space, exclaimed: "I am always in bed, always ungainly, and always bearing children." Less and less sensitive to sensual pleasures, she welcomed Louis XV's demands with distaste and wanted a little freedom; she was assailed by a weariness she could not fight against nor even hide; and this helped bring on her misfortunes.

The king noticed his wife's lack of warmth and

spread the rumour of a secret love, mentioning quite without proof the name of the Duchesse de Bourbon. He met her at the home of his grand-uncle, the Comte de Toulouse, whom he often visited at the Château de Rambouillet. In these parts a pleasant atmosphere of youth and liberty held sway, and when he went back there he took a delight in forgetting the strict conventions and the behaviour demanded at Versailles.

A swarm of bewitching beauties hovered round the Comte and Comtesse de Toulouse; as well as Marie-Anne de Bourbon-Condé there were the five Nesle sisters, rivals in grace, and in all the beauty of their first youth; the eldest was married to the Comte de Mailly, the second to the Comte de Vintimille, the other three to the Marquis de Flavacourt, the Duc de Brancas-Lauraguais and the Marquis de la Tournelle.

Louis XV acquired new habits, sat long at table with a gay company, frequently drained his cup of champagne, intoxicated himself with new sensations, and returned to his apartments very late. Balls and parties began to have more of a hold on him, and the sight of a pretty woman to move him. He was too young to resist completely the first fervours of happiness and of passion; no stone was left unturned to lead him from the narrow way; and no-one could have remained insensible to the charms displayed before him.

The Duchesse de Boufflars, lady-in-waiting to the Queen, Mlle de Charolais, Mlle de Beaujolais, Mme Portail the president's wife, Mme d'Ancezune,

a drive in the park. In the meanwhile several charges were fired from the cannon in the forecourt. Lavish refreshments were served to the officers of the King's Guard and all the people in His Majesty's retinue; and he returned to Fontainebleau very satisfied with the visit he had paid Marshal de Villars." These words, quoted by M. Jean Cordey in his masterly work in the *Château de Vaux*, depict in a lively way one of the sovereign's numerous visits.

At Marly, they gambled for fantastic stakes; Marie Leczinska lost two thousand pounds in three days. Piquet, cavagnolle and quadrille were the rage; people met round a table; Louis XV set the example and nothing could restrain his extravagance. Besides gambling, walking and hunting, concerts and theatrical performances still enlivened the occupations of the Court. A frivolous existence in the eyes of many historians, an existence which was a cover to a harder life of work and the planning of the most difficult problems.

It is foolish to judge a man according to his pleasures and amusements and the moments when he is off his guard and heedless; one should get beneath the surface to understand and appreciate him; and take a wide view of the whole field of his actions. Now, when it is a question of Louis XV, these show an extreme complexity. To claim that one can tell of his reign with a series of spicy tales, to depict him in the midst of banquets and amusements, to be insistent about the license of his passions, and accept stories wantonly fabricated

grew more and more irritated by some of her ways. A chilly person, Marie liked a mass of coverings on her bed, while Louis XV found it very hot and uncomfortable; she took a long time to get to sleep, and had a servant tell her stories of her country, even when the king was lying at her side. Through quite innocent customs and tastes, and through a complete ignorance of psychology, she compromised relations that meant much, and made her company less agreeable to the king; imperceptibly he began to come less frequently to her room, till the day when he did not come any more.

She did not know how to keep him interested; Stanislas Leczinski once said: "My wife and my daughter are the two most boring queens I have ever met." In spite of the exaggeration obvious in such a statement there can be seen an element of truth; to beguile the monotony of hours spent in the queen's room Louis XV used to kill flies on the window panes; play cards and talk with some of the ladies; he was always impatient to get on his horse to go to Rambouillet, Fontainebleau, Madrid, or one of his hunting rendez-vous.

*Le Mercure de France* records the king's visit to Vaux-le-Vicomte on 20th July 1731.

"His Majesty," it says, "examined attentively the pictures representing the campaigns of his host, the Marshal de Villars, the places he had attacked and the battles he had fought. After the king had amused himself for a while in the rooms, he got into a carriage with Mme de Villars and went for



It is enough to read the correspondence between the king and the Marshal de Noailles, and to analyse his actions during fifty years, to realize the folly of such a method.

However, towards the last days of 1732, strange rumours agitated Versailles, and the monarch's conduct was made the object of much comment; Marie Leczinska felt the keenest alarm. While dining at La Muette in a festive company, and carried away by wine and excitement, Louis raised his cup and drank to the health of the "*Inconnue*" — an allusion to the woman who occupied his thoughts, and of whom his insatiable heart was dreaming. Scarcely had he pronounced this enigmatic word when curiosity was awakened; the field was cleared for all sorts of suppositions — but not for long; in August 1733 no-one could be unaware of the popularity of Mme de Mailly.

in the last years of the eighteenth century to precipitate the coming of a new state, would be a ridiculous and an unfortunate attitude — an attitude, nevertheless, adopted by a great number of writers, and one which still today misleads a vast public.

The recital of Louis XV's conjugal infidelities and his amours, the thousand and one scandals of a court teeming with intrigues and ill-will, the pamphlets of men of letters, the censure of magistrates and churchmen, have disfigured the true likeness of the king.

From the year 1733, the history of the Beloved starts out on a series of amours, secret meetings, debauchery and brazenly paraded vices. His study of political problems and problems of diplomacy, the long hours spent in cabinet and council, decisions made in painful circumstances, the exchange of questions of policy with the ministers, sometimes noteworthy, his interest in arts, literature, sciences and religious questions, were as nothing compared with his licentiousness.

From his first transgression to his final liaison with the Du Barry, history had been eager to retain every detail of every infidelity and every indiscretion of the king, giving them an unduly prominent place, and making them the essential part of a reign really occupied by the most serious problems. Thus one of the most important periods of the Ancien Régime has been grossly misrepresented and Louis XV appears in a totally different light from the light of reality.

meeting with an enthusiastic welcome, spread unbelievably rapidly and did their part in forming the opinion of the masses.

The infamies published about the Jesuits and the Jansenists are beyond belief; the coarse language in daily use about the great lords is remarkable for its filthy tone; from the midst of a European war Barbier could write: "All our French marshals in Italy and in Germany have a very ill repute; songs and attacks spare none of them."

While Villars, Berwick and so many others rivalled one another in talent, courage and heroism, while our armies were making themselves conspicuous for their exploits, a secret press did their best to bring the utmost discredit and odium on those whose mission it was to defend the soil of France. Nothing could temper the harshness of unsigned writings; they travestied truth, gave credence to lies, and followed a destructive policy.

Reforms of all kinds, financial, economic, administrative, military, brought about during Louis XV's reign with such patience and foresight, were for ever turned to ridicule; in heaping sarcasm and insult upon them, people misconstrued and made a mock of them. Fleury, the Contrôleur Orry, Villars, the majority of the ministers, received a large share of the accusations; the public came to hate and detest them; the pamphlets were largely believed; artlessness and folly were at their height. Because writers offered them an Eden full of Utopias and denounced the alleged errors of the moment, men hastened to accept the worst

## Chapter V

### THE SOVEREIGN'S DOMESTIC LIFE AND FAMILY JOYS. THE REIGN OF MADAME DE MAILLY

(1733—1738)

THE French have always loved to criticize themselves, to reveal their faults and underline their every eccentricity; they have an instinctively censorious spirit and spare nothing; an innate gift for raillery and banter leads them to take dangerous paths. Their critical spirit has never done them a worse turn than in the eighteenth century; for a wave of pamphlets, lampoons and propaganda spread its muddy waters over all the events of these times.

Clergy, magistrates, nobility and royal power were dragged in the dust; no-one was safe from anonymous attacks, and no-one could preserve himself from infamous charges; justice remained powerless; she pursued two will-o'the-wisps that continually eluded and made sport of her.

Gazettes, both French and foreign, printed tales and anecdotes often quite false, thus spreading criminal rumours; they had much authority among scandal-loving readers who were glad to uncover the secrets and the vices of the mighty. After 1733 their voices grew more insistent; leaflets became more out-spoken; they baffled all criticism; and,

policy met with nothing but criticism; it was treated as weak. There was already a malicious story in circulation about the character of Louis XV; he lived in idleness, took no interest in the destiny of the kingdom, frequented parties and wore himself out at the hunt; also that he was directed by incapable, weak-willed, unintelligent ministers; and he spent great sums of money at a time when the people were suffering severe hardships.

Frederick II paid lavishly for such pictures; he applauded such a fine portrait of a king who was his enemy, for it served his interests all the better; England and Holland acted in the same way. The sudden changes in opinion of the years 1733—1774 would seem unaccountable without an exact knowledge of the satires, the gazettes and the lampoons that saw the light at that time. Indeed their influence overstepped the realm of literature, and set in motion the upheavals of the Revolution.

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In February 1733, Augustus II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, died leaving vacant the throne once occupied by Stanislas Leczinski; he stood as candidate in opposition to Augustus III; new hopes were revealed before his eyes. Fleury, desirous of maintaining friendly relations with England, feared to meddle in Poland's affairs, and feared a general conflict which might have serious consequences.

Poland's independence remained one of the necessities of French policy; the pledge of support

calumnies. Calumny was the great goddess of the eighteenth century; her empire was established on a firm basis, and she succeeded in undermining the best constructed edifices, thus providing a poison of which so many of the citizens took their fill.

When one reads the judgments passed on diplomats, generals, ministers and prelates of the years 1733—1789, one has the feeling of looking on at a terrible game of massacre; it was a decaying world, rotten to the core, a world accursed, that led France to ultimate ruin.

An impartial study of the varied life of the kingdom, a just estimation of men according to their deeds and their consequences, make it possible to measure the falsity and emptiness of this ocean of prejudice, and to show why so many historians deformed and misrepresented the grandeur and the service of the reign of Louis XV. Pamphlets and lampoons from foreign sources, inspired by the country's enemies and crystallizing the claims, the jealousy and the hatred of nations who desired our humiliation, served outside interests and constantly betrayed us. They came from Holland, Germany, England and Italy; many were printed in Paris; their authors were blind or criminally malicious Frenchmen.

The evils realized in a few years were considerable, we still are suffering their consequences. Worthy and conscientious memoir-writers like Mathieu Marais and Barbier did not avoid the influence of newsmongers; they heard the echoes and did not discern their falsity. Fleury's prudent

Marshal de Berwick, while inspecting the siege-works at Philisbourg, had his head carried away by a bullet. De Broglie and Coigny, a little after, won the victories of Parma and Guastalla, while the Spaniards seized the kingdom of Naples. Marshal de Noailles, for twenty years Captain-General of the royal armies, Knight of the Golden Fleece, a grandee of Spain, loved and respected at Court, received in 1735 the command of the troops in Italy.

Around a nucleus of excellent generals, a brilliant but sometimes inexperienced nobility had attained the highest ranks of the army; privileges of rank played their part in nominations almost invariably — that was to be one of the evils of the *Ancien Régime*. Nevertheless frivolous young nobles, used to fine parties at Versailles, broken in to the rules of convention, showed themselves at their best under enemy fire; they found once more the courage of their ancestors, and their rashness and daring. So we see Charles-René-Armand de La Trémoïlle, Duc de Thouars, handsome and effeminate, well acquainted with ladies and boudoirs, hurl himself into the fray, receive a bullet through his hat, another through his coat, and, the evening after the battle, go off to a dance as if he were still at Court.

Anxious to limit the consequences of a war of which he partly disapproved, Fleury felt the futility of the attainment of their objectives. Stanislas Leczinski's cause was utterly lost; Austria wanted an honorable peace; Spain, having got

against Germany and Russia, she preserved the equilibrium of Europe. Under pretext of demanding Stanislas' rights, Chauvelin, the keeper of the seals and State secretary for foreign affairs, was loud in his support of armed intervention, and wanted to obstruct the House of Austria by an understanding with Sweden, Poland and Turkey. He succeeded in breaking down Fleury's hostility and receiving Louis XV's whole-hearted approval.

The hatred of Austria, revived and goaded into fanaticism, made war almost popular; Villars and Belle-Isle showed an absolute assurance; so Stanislas went to Warsaw full of illusions; the Polish Diet elected two sovereigns, causing the utmost confusion. Fifteen thousand men were sent to the aid of Louis XV's father-in-law; the Comte de Plelo was killed in a desperate fight, and our armies had to capitulate. In the month of October, France, Spain and Sardinia declared war on Austria; and military operations took place in Italy and Germany.

On 11<sup>th</sup> November, Villars, now more than eighty years old, rejoined his troops at Pizzighetone; Louis XV had given him the title of Marshal-General of the Camp and Army. Being extraordinarily vigorous, the marshal was equal to his task; on 7<sup>th</sup> December he occupied the line of the Oglio, and he seized the Château of Milan on 30<sup>th</sup> December. Owing to illness Villars had to give up his command and died at Turin on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1734 after a supremely glorious career. Five days before,



liked a more glorious war — the definite crushing of Austria and the destruction of their old hereditary foe. Foolish fantasies that Fleury had the good sense to resist; in doing so, he took his stand against the dangers of Utopian dreams, showed extraordinary vision, broke with popular ideas and inaugurated a totally new diplomacy. Chauvelin, the chancellor, a keen war-monger and one of the anti-Austrian party, had to be dismissed; the cardinal sacrificed him to political necessities, despite his friendship for a man he had always supported and protected.

Louis XV's rôle in these difficult years seems rather a minor one; he gave his old tutor complete and well-placed confidence. Attracted by Chauvelin's theories, he had at first welcomed the idea of a decisive struggle with Austria; then he had rallied to the reason of his Prime Minister, by signing in June 1737 the order for the chancellor's exile.

Reviews of troops, councils of ministers, promotion of officers, Te Deums of thanksgiving, had surrounded the young king with the din of war without his ever playing a principal part as a Louis XIII would have done. Villars, with an old soldier's frankness, had even suggested to the monarch that he put himself at the head of his troops. A suggestion in principle excellent, but made impracticable by the king's delicate state of health, his weak nervous control and the value set on his life.

what she desired, was for putting an end to hostilities. The emperor Charles VI, beaten, appealed to England, asking for the mediation of the Naval powers between France and Austria; Walpole, known to be a pacifist, lent himself readily to this measure. On his side, Fleury preferred to treat without a mediator; in 1735 several preliminary peace-measures cleared the atmosphere; three years later the anguish and alarms of all those who feared a European conflagration were allayed by the signing of the Treaty of Vienna. In this treaty France guaranteed to Austria the Pragmatic Sanction, and recognized Augustus III as king of Poland; as compensation Stanislas received the duchies of Bar and Lorraine which thereafter reverted to the crown; François, Duke of Lorraine, the betrothed of Marie-Thérèse, renounced his rights. Don Carlos the Infante, seeing that his rights to Naples were assured, abandoned the duchies of Parma, Plaisance and Tuscany. Appreciable results, — for France annexed one of the finest provinces, and one of those most useful for her security; a peaceful annexation with no bloodshed, rebellion or violence.

Poland was one of Stanislas' lost dreams; but in return Louis XV was rid of a great embarrassment and a source of perpetual conflicts with the House of Austria; Spain was to develop on the lines indicated by French policy.

In spite of its advantages, the Treaty of Vienna met with the disapproval of the anti-Austrian faction; the majority of Frenchmen would have

was captain of the guard in 1737. One evening he had supped with the king, who had not spoken a word to him. When everyone had gone, Louis XV, his way lit by a valet de chambre, went up to the apartments of the duke, who was in bed, and knocked at the door. D'Ayen, wakening with a start, asked who was knocking. The king answered: "It is I!" and the duke recognizing his voice opened the door to him at once, exclaiming, "why, sire, where are you going at this time of night?" "Get dressed quickly." "Where are we going?" was the question. "Don't worry about that." "I must ring," said the Duke, — "I haven't any shoes here." "No!" replied the king, "no-one is to come, we are going to the ball at the Opéra." "Well then," d'Ayen exclaimed, "I'll go and look, myself, for the shoes I took off." When he was dressed, he and the king went down into the courtyard, arm-in-arm; when they had to pass a gate guarded by a sentinel the duke said: "It is I, the Duc d'Ayen." "I have the honour to recognize you, my Lord," the soldier replied. After passing through several doors in this way, they came up with the carriages that awaited them, where there were already some young nobles.

At the end of supper the king had taken the precaution of writing two letters himself, one to the first squire to give orders to have coaches ready and to see that there were stages at Sèvres; the other to Marie-Leczinska to tell her that he was going secretly and incognito to the ball at the Opéra, and not to be at all anxious. About six in

In March 1733, a Jesuit, Father Tainturier, preached the Lenten services before Louis XV. This priest, with the bold severity of Bossuet, apostrophized the king in violent terms that astonished and amazed him. He eloquently rebuked his laxness, exhorted him to become the shining light of his council, to influence the decisions of the ministers, for whom he was responsible, to go himself to war when need arose; in short his criticism and advice stupefied the courtiers with their frankness and audacity. Such an attitude on the part of a Jesuit seemed singular, and it met with the full approval of Louis XV; he did not miss a sermon, and showed genuine satisfaction. His friends at Versailles claimed to see Fleury's influence, — that Father Tainturier had spoken to his orders, in the hope of recalling the monarch to State affairs and thereby wrecking Chauvelin's ambitious schemes.

Far from wanting to turn his master from home and foreign policy, the Prime Minister showed admirable pertinacity in ceaselessly recalling him to it; he did not want anyone after his death to be able to gain the king's confidence and direct him. He voluntarily closed his eyes to the growing passions of his old pupil, and succeeded in lessening their violence.

In his *Journal* Barbier has left us the story of one of Louis XV's foolish enterprises; it is the epitome of his favorite amusements between 1734 and 1745.

The Duc d'Ayen, son of Marshal de Noailles,

comical look. She has little wit and no ideas." Another contemporary wrote: "For a long time the Comtesse de Mailly had been talked of as being the king's mistress, but it did not seem to be quite certain. She is not pretty and she is twenty-seven, but she is well-proportioned, amusing and witty. This intrigue is conducted always in secret, because Cardinal Fleury keeps it quiet; but it is not possible for Court and officers to fail to notice it.

"They say that at Versailles, when the king is going to and from supper in his smaller apartments, he sometimes goes from his room to his dressing-room by himself and stays there for two hours. We do not doubt that the said lady enters from behind, through the agency of Bachelier the king's first valet-de-chambre.

"At Fontainebleau, behind the king's rooms, there is a furnished suite inhabited by no-one, he has the key and goes down by a little stairway; the rooms given to Mme de Mailly are quite close. They say also that she goes to suppers at La Muette. The king has not slept with the queen for seven months. And they say that the king gives the countess a pension of six thousand pounds a month."

The decisive step on the path of an immoral life, condemned by all the laws of the Church, was not taken without violent and painful inner conflict. Brought up to respect and obey the precepts of religion, accustomed to attend mass with piety, imbued with a strong feeling for the divine nature of his mission on earth, Louis XV hesitated

the morning the Duc d'Ayen and Louis XV returned to Versailles, and they had to go through rooms that were locked and guarded.

As they knocked at one of the doors the sentinel demanded: "Who is it?" "Open, it is the king!" answered d'Ayen. "The king should be in bed now; I shall not open, and you will not pass, whoever you are, without a light!" So a candle had to be found, and then the sentinel recognized the king and said: "I beg Your Majesty's pardon, but I must not let anyone pass this way. Would you please relieve me of my charge." Louis XV showed himself delighted to see his orders so well observed, and congratulated the guard.

The custom of going to balls at the Opéra, of returning home late, of living in high-spirited company, and of amusing himself with entertainments and parties, little by little changed his character. Marie Leczinska was greatly saddened by it; she could not restrain an uncontrollable feeling of disgust when he entered her room bringing with him the atmosphere of places of pleasure, reeking of wine and half-fuddled. In September 1736 d'Argenson noted in his journal:

"The king, unable to confine himself to the attractions of the queen, has taken as mistress Mme de Mailly, born on 16th March 1710, daughter of Louis de Mailly, Lord of Nesle, and of Félice-Armande-Mazarini, a lady of the Court, married in 1726 to her cousin Louis-Alexandre, Comte de Mailly. She is well-proportioned but ugly, a big mouth with good teeth that gives her rather a

strictness and gratifying devotion; we need a little more time to judge if this talk has any foundation. People have noticed that one cannot pronounce *her* name (the Comtesse de Mailly's) in the king's hearing without his blushing; and today they say that he speaks her name himself without embarrassment."

Marie Leczinska soon heard the extent of her misfortune; for the Comtesse de Mailly was her own lady-in-waiting; so when she asked permission to go to Compiègne, where she intended to meet the king, Marie said to her: "Do what you like, you're the mistress." A word of double meaning, writes G. Lenôtre, which was repeated with much comment as a standing proof of the queen's ill fortune. Rambouillet was the scene of a first unlawful love affair; there reigned there a precious freedom, absolute peace; and convention was easily relaxed; and suppers, hunting parties, concerts, gambling and many diversions all added to the place's attractions. One can understand how G. Lenôtre found it impossible to explain the Comtesse de Toulouse's attitude; his surprise that a strictly virtuous woman should have no qualms in seeing her castle used as cover for the king's amorous pastimes, and thus a subject of scandal intolerable in the eyes of a person of strict morals. Far from showing her disapproval, she readily lent herself to Louis XV's caprices; he changed the royal apartments as he wished; Gabriel contrived that they should communicate with those of the Comtesse de Mailly; the huge rooms were decorated by the best artists, and in those rooms, jealously

between duty and the satisfaction of his senses; and, when he had chosen pleasures he could not resist, he still retained feelings of sadness, and bitterness and regret for his former ways. In his young heart still lived his innate feeling for what was pure and good; he had inherited from the Duke of Burgundy a natural leaning towards conventional life, love of family, natural timidity with women, a secret dislike of worldly pleasures and a desire for solitude and tranquillity.

However he had in his veins the blood of Marie-Adelaide of Savoy, the lively, frivolous Duchess of Burgundy; he had inherited from her great weakness in face of temptation and a positive need for excitement and for taking advantage of the delights presented to the eyes. One who had considered marriage as the highest and most solemn of sacraments, when he saw the exhaustion of all his married joys, the king in 1734 at the age of twenty found himself in the state of a man of fifty; so rapid a passage through life's experiences left him disillusioned, uneasy and a prey for mischievous insinuations. These were never lacking; they reaped the benefit of Marie Leczinska's lassitude and the ardour of his exacting and imperious sensuality.

For a long time the Duc de Luyne rejected the idea of a scandalous attachment, and did not dare write the name of the Comtesse de Mailly in his memoirs; the idea seemed so impossible to him. Nevertheless he noted evasively: "It is difficult to reconcile these ideas with what we see of his piety,



Mailly calmly replied: 'Since you know her you might pray for her!'"

After her death a hair-cloth was found on her chair; she had made atonement for a short-lived mistake, and paid the penalty for her sins. The very time when she seemed happiest in the eyes of the world was full of worries for her; Louis XV showed himself fickle and inconstant; he was seeking the society of Mme de Beuvron, a beautiful and dangerous intriguer, Mme Amelot and certain ladies of lower birth about whom spread highly discreditable rumours, which were accepted by the Memoirs of d'Argenson and Soulavie.

It was not the Comtesse de Mailly's influence that Fleury feared, but rather Mlle de Charolais' and the Maréchale d'Estrée's, and Bachelier the first valet-de-chambre who was a kind of messenger and go-between. He knew the cunning design of certain unscrupulous people of using the mistress so as to get an easy influence over the king and obtain what they wanted of him. In the hands of a group of designing profligates Mme de Mailly became a formidable weapon. The cardinal felt the urgency of the danger and tried to lead Louis XV back to the narrow path; in September 1738 he showed his discontent by his sudden departure to Issy; then he came back, resigned to accepting the inevitable.

Later he realized how little harm the countess had done and endeavoured to give her her due; for *she* had never meddled in any diplomatic or political intrigue, she had demanded nothing for

guarded from mischievous curiosity, were gathered undreamed-of treasures. In such bright, new surroundings the king's scruples diminished, and also his remorse; he would at times forget his misdeeds or excuse them; he made himself a new life, succeeded in dispelling his alarms and regrets, and thought no more of the poor queen so unjustly abandoned, his children, or his ministers who criticized and disapproved of him. He thought he had shaken off the fetters which hindered him and made him unhappy.

For the moment, in spite of the retinue of five hundred that he took with him wherever he went, in spite of spying glances and impassive faces, behind which he detected such complex feelings, he made himself a haven. The woman he loved was sensitive, tender and unselfish, lively and melancholy at the same time, not over-intelligent but soft-hearted and considerate. On all occasions the Comtesse de Mailly showed a nature free from greed and ambition, asking nothing for herself, accepting the niggardly presents of an economical king; never did any favorite demand so little.

After experiencing exceptional favours, she was to die in loneliness and poverty; and Count Fleury tells us that she was converted by Father Renaud and led a life of penitence and mortification till her death; he throws a light on her character with the following story: "To the lawyer Linguet's insulting remark one day in the Church of Saint-Roche where she had disarranged a few seats: 'That's enough trouble for a whore!' Mme de

we see an exact appreciation of the situation; Fleury regretted and deplored a state of affairs that he could not approve of; but he was glad that as partner of his sins Louis XV had met a woman who lacked malice and vice.

As churchman and statesman, as diplomat skilled in the most difficult problems and conscious of his responsibilities, he tried to avert the evil; unable to resist the suddenness of the events he recognized his old pupil's happy choice. More, he established friendly relations between himself and Mme de Mailly and showed great confidence in her.

Was that duplicity or deceit? it was rather the intelligent foresight of a practical man, and an understanding of the demands of the moment. At any price the cardinal had to keep his influence over Louis XV, whose character and ideas he knew and whose headstrong impulses and extreme youth caused him some misgivings. And that influence never waned; death alone could finally break it.

So religion still kept its hold on the king, and he used often to repent his misdeeds; he offered up fervent prayers for the remission of his sins, attended Mass and the longest ceremonies, read the services with attention, approached the Communion Table at Easter with tears for the sins he hated, but to which he soon returned, unable to resist them. In accordance with his confessor's demands, he often returned to Marie Leczinska, and unreservedly, with happiness and satisfaction; there was nothing false or deceitful about him; he was an erring soul, a weak and sorrowful soul that

herself, she had been satisfied with the king's love without looking for material advantages from her enviable position; and she had baffled the plans of those who wanted to mould her to their will.

Apart from the scandal of a liaison contrary to his principles, Fleury must have regretted Mme de Mailly when he reckoned the difference between so sweet and submissive a creature and the haughty tyranny of the favorites who came after her. Later he wrote to the Duchesse de Brancas the strange letter quoted by Pierre de Nolhac: "Oh, if only you knew how necessary it was for Mme de Mailly to hold the king's heart, and how fatal it would have been to take him from her, how he had to be kept faithful to her. The Maréchale d'Estrée, however wrong it was in the eyes of God, was right to plan and encourage that attachment! No doubt these are strange things for a priest to be saying; but Louis XV's court, like Louis XIV's, is too different from Saint Louis'. The king was beginning to be afraid of the queen; she had been snared in the intrigues of the Duke and Mme de Prie. The king could have been destroyed by a bad choice; only a good could save him. If you knew how I prayed in agony, and how I cursed my power that was yet powerless over Louis XV's heart! The king at least has Mme de Mailly's virtues; leave them to him! I have only a short time to live; but to see the king entrusted me by Louis XIV betray his last hopes! I shall never see it without punishing those who betrayed his youth."

In these words, far from hypocrisy and pretence,

Daily life at Versailles between 1735 and 1770 lives again in the Memoirs of the Duc de Luynes and the Prince de Cröy; these are valuable documents written by sincere men incapable of disguising the truth, impartial witnesses without passion or malice whose impressions recreate before our eyes a vanished age. Albert Duc de Luynes, an intimate of Marie Leczinska, one of the queen's circle which included those shining lights President Hénault and d'Argenson, left vivid pictures of his queen, restful and intimate like the portraits of Van Meer of Delft or Pieter de Hooch. Thanks to him we can see into those retired rooms, where lived the deserted wife, and admire a useful life full of kindness and goodness.

Though an early riser Marie scarcely ever found time to do all she planned; the morning, devoted to prayers and moral readings, ended with a visit to the king and a little light amusement. About half past twelve she dressed; then dinner with about ten ladies. The queen would talk with each of them, find out their respective tastes, say a few kindly and flattering words to them, skilfully guide the conversation away from commonplaces; for she had a gift for interesting and charming her guests. Then going into her rooms she busied herself with tapestry and other such work, or else recounted what she had read with skill and vivacity. She was musical and loved to play the guitar, the harpsichord and the vielle, making a jest of her poor efforts, and laughing heartily when people tried to compliment her on them. At three o'clock she

had been violently brought down to earth, and that aspired to greater heights without the ability to make the efforts necessary for their attainment.

Could one expect an active young man as handsome as a god, married to a not particularly attractive woman, older than himself, and worn out with child-bearing, a man who held the throne of France, whose eyes beheld every day a swarm of fascinating beauties — could one imagine such a man to be unfeelingly circumspect and virtuous? Without being a saint, Louis XV could not resist the temptations offered his desires. Deprived of a mother's tenderness and understanding, an orphan from babyhood and delivered into strange hands, flattered, admired and showered with every good thing, he was all the more susceptible to the bewitching voices of sirens; and who can cast the first stone without fear of falsehood or hypocrisy!

If the honours and distinctions that Mme de Mailly enjoyed were a secret to none, Louis XV knew how to save appearances, preserve a royal dignity even in his forbidden loves, and employ a real discretion for fear of the slightest impairment of the prestige of the throne. By his exacting observance of a meticulous etiquette, he set a good example and often rose above his weariness and boredom. Foreign ambassadors were struck by Louis XV's kingly bearing, his dignified charm, his easy handling of affairs of the greatest as well as the least importance.

hurt anyone, she sought immediately an opportunity for consoling him.

The Duke and Duchess de Luynes, who benefited by her friendship, spoke with feeling of the pleasure taken in her company; their testimony agrees with President Hénault's. It would be a mistake to picture a narrow, bigoted and boring *milieu* or a bitter and resigned one; everything points to the contrary.

With Louis XV the queen showed a respect that was suggestive of frustrated love, accepting wounds and affronts without a murmur, and living to the letter the precepts of the Gospel. Tender and affectionate as a mother she lavished on her children the treasures of a devoted and loving heart; and she followed their progress and directed their education.

In 1736 six delicately beautiful daughters occupied her attention and took her mind from her sorrows; they were Marie-Louise-Elizabeth and Anne-Henriette aged nine, delightful little things with lively charming faces, Marie-Adélaïde, who was four, Marie-Louise-Thérèse-Victoire born on 11th May 1733, and lastly Sophie-Philippe-Elizabeth-Justine, and Marie-Thérèse-Félicité, who came into the world one on 27th July 1734, the other on 16th May 1736. The princesses' governess was Mme de Ventadour. After educating Louis XV she was in the same kind way educating the children of the King; the Duchesse de Tallard, her grand-daughter, took on the regular functions of a charge too heavy for a person of her age;

went to dinner, then took up her reading again, with a preference for philosophical and historical works; Malebranche's dryness did not frighten her in the least; an excellent memory enabled her to retain whole passages — which astonished and surprised the courtiers; she read moderately well French, Polish, German and Italian. These moments of quiet and solitude, of rest, both physical and moral, in the midst of the feverish bustle of the court, were her delight.

When it struck six, the habitués of her parties began to arrive; and they played cavagnole, or discoursed on all sorts of different subjects.

Marie Leczinska forbade talk of affairs of State, or court gossip or intrigue, never allowing slander or scandal-mongering. Of an ironical turn of wit she underlined the humour of men and things quite without malice, and encouraged mild arguments and wholesome discussions. She loved to laugh and to make others laugh. Several of her repartees have remained famous. One day, on the death of the Marshal of Saxony, a protestant, she said: "It is a pity not to be able to sing a 'De Profundis' for a man who has made us sing so many 'Te Deums'!" Another time she remarked: "If courtiers sought heavenly favours as they do Court favours, they would be great saints." Anxious to put everyone at his ease, Marie did away with constraint and stiffness; around her reigned great freedom, so long as there was no talk of politics or religion. If by chance she thought she had



tutor, the Bishop de Mirepoix, two attendants, two deputy tutors, and Abbé Saint-Cyr, his second preceptor. Entering his room he was surprised to find the shutters closed and a marionette show all ready; and the performance began at once. In the hope of lessening the grief of a painful separation, Cardinal Fleury had planned this distraction; and he stayed close by the Dauphin all through the show. Henceforth the Prince's household comprised more than seventy-five people; the right of entry to the Queen was extended to Louis of France.

He was a mischievous child and his grace and funny sayings and precocity were a delight. Once he asked M. Alary: "What are you reading in that book?" The tutor replied: "I am reading that Your Highness must study." "Let me look," said the Dauphin. "I read that I must have a good time."

After September 1737 on Sundays there was a ball in the Dauphin's apartments, and on Thursdays in the Ladies' rooms. The king and queen loved to attend sports which recalled happy memories; they applauded the minuets and quadrilles, and congratulated Marie-Louise-Elizabeth and Anne-Henriette, delighted with their liveliness and grace. Louis XV enjoyed his children's company, amused them with hundreds of tenderly planned games, took part in their sports and watched them with undisguised satisfaction, inquiring fully into all that concerned them. With them he forgot his cares and his royal dignity, he banished

the Marquises de Villefort, de Muy and de La Lande bore the titles of *sous-gouvernantes*. A great number of ladies, waiting women and servants were attached to the young princesses, who had to submit from babyhood to rules of etiquette, and to suffer their tyranny. Their least actions were precisely regulated; Marie Leczinska could not see them so often as she wanted and each interview was accompanied by tedious ceremonials.

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Tradition demanded that the Dauphin should be handed over to men after his eighth birthday. On 15th January 1736 Louis XV anticipated the set date on consideration of his son's excellent health and precocious intelligence. He chose M. de Châtillon as tutor, presenting the Dauphin to him with the following words: "Sir, I am giving my dearest possession into your hands;" then he said to the young prince: "You must obey M. de Châtillon as if he were myself." Then he directed his eyes to Mme de Ventadour saying: "Never forget how good Mme de Ventadour has been to you." The good duchess, who adored the Dauphin and had cared for him since his birth, was quite overcome and, unable to restrain her tears, left the room sobbing.

The Dauphin wanted to run after her, but M. de Châtillon kindly but firmly blocked his way; every detail of the scene recalled the time when Louis XV was his son's age. The little prince went back to his apartments escorted by his new

proxy, married the princess, who became henceforth the Infanta; there was a huge succession of parties at Versailles and Paris, and nothing was spared to enhance the brilliance. Banquets, illuminations, balls, concerts, water carnivals on the Seine, were a show of beauty and magnificence, and the City of Paris spent more than sixty thousand pounds on them.

The time for her departure drew near; the little Infanta spent half an hour in private with the queen, and mother and daughter lamented a final separation; they would never again be able to see one another and show their mutual love; and many tears were shed on both sides. Then leaving the queen, the princess went to Louis XV; he turned quite pale and could not restrain his emotion, embracing her fondly and quite unable to control his grief.

Marie-Louise-Elizabeth and her sister Anne-Henriette adored one another, and sadly expressed their common grief, repeating: "It's for ever!" And when the Infanta entered her carriage the Dauphin burst into tears, while the king and four ladies took their places at the princess's side.

It was a gloomy trip from Versailles to Plessis-Piquet; still, Louis XV overcame the sadness of his thoughts and spoke to his daughter of the duties that awaited her in Spain; he made the best use of these last moments in instructing and warning her; and he behaved with such kindness and feeling that witnesses could barely restrain their emotion.

remorse for his misdeeds, and seemed completely happy.

Facts recorded by the Duc de Luynes show us how great was the king's love for his children. In September 1738 a marriage was arranged between Don Philip, younger son of Philip of Spain, and Marie-Louise-Elizabeth; it fulfilled the requirements of policy, and answered the need of friendship between neighbouring nations. So the little princess was to leave her country after her twelfth birthday in the following year. On 21st August 1739, Marquis de Mina, the Spanish ambassador, began the official procedure. After calling at the residence of the special ambassadors, he made a triumphant entry into Versailles amid great military display; bowing before Louis XV he handed him his master's letter and delivered a speech in Spanish, the king answering in French.

Then, taken before Marie Leszinska with whom was Cardinal Fleury, he paid her some flowery compliments and then passed on to see the Dauphin and Marie-Louise-Elizabeth; the little princess, covered with confusion, was presented with a bracelet with a picture on it of Don Philip.

Four days of lavish preliminaries passed by; the signing of the contract and the betrothal ceremony took place on 25th August. It was a spectacle of unusual pomp and splendour; such a profusion of precious stones and gold and jewellery had not been seen since the days of Louis XIV, nor so many richly coloured robes.

On the following day the Duke of Orleans, as

sending them to Fontevrault Abbey in Touraine; there they would be trained and educated, living among nuns away from the world.

It was a surprising decision and difficult to understand; and it caused Marie Leczinska untold grief; almost a cruel decision when one realizes that the princesses of France were to spend their childhood and their youth among strange faces, far from those who were dearest to them. The pretext of economy seems a poor one, and is discountenanced by the huge amounts the Court expended on other things; lack of room at Versailles is no excuse, for the plans of the palace, as it was then, show room enough to house them; and the desire to preserve innocent souls from evil examples has no weight when one thinks of the peaceful family atmosphere that reigned in the queen's apartments.

But, however it was, Marie-Louise-Thérèse-Victoire, Sophie-Philippe-Elizabeth-Justine, Marie-Thérèse-Félicité and Louise-Marie (born 15<sup>th</sup> July 1737) left Versailles on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1738. Little Louise-Marie, still an infant, was in the arms of a waiting-woman on the far side of the coach, and the Marquise de La Lande had Marie-Thérèse-Félicité on her knee; Sophie and Victoire were silent and thoughtful. The heavy carriage was escorted by twelve of the body-guard under M. d'Antichamp; and on 28<sup>th</sup> June they drove in to Fontevrault. The princesses were received by Mme de Rochechouart, the abbess, and her sister the Duchesse de Lesdiguières and some nuns. The

Then the inevitable parting came, the king got out of the carriage and Marie-Louise-Elizabeth continued on her way to Spain; she was not likely to have the joy of seeing her parents again; for another existence full of pitfalls and mystery was opening before her eyes. But being energetic when the occasion called for it, and good and kind, and sympathetic towards all she came in contact with, she could not but bewitch the Spaniards with her excellent gifts.

M. Casimir Stryiński quotes the letters that passed between Louis XV and Philip V after the marriage: "I could not fail to inform Your Majesty," wrote the King of Spain, "of the safe arrival of the Infanta, your daughter — a most accomplished princess who I am sure will make my son happy. I believe Your Majesty will be pleased to learn that the marriage took place with great good will." Louis XV replied: "I learned with the greatest satisfaction from Your Majesty's letter of my daughter the Infanta's happy arrival at Alcala; and that there is nothing lacking to the joy of the bridal pair."

But another note of grief was to disturb the king; a little while before, in June 1738, he had been obliged to yield to Fleury's request that the king's five daughters should leave him for a while for economic reasons. Being anxious to cut down the considerable expenses demanded to support the retinue of the royal children, and at the same time to get them away from the vicious atmosphere of the court, the cardinal had the idea of

entrusted, and they could not have been in better hands.

Gabriel and M. d'Aubert performed some great works to welcome the princesses; the Bourbon dwelling, almost completely reconstructed and furnished luxuriously and comfortably, cost nearly sixty-five thousand pounds; nothing was neglected to make it bright and attractive; furniture, pictures, sculpture and tapestries composed a rich and harmonious background. The education offered at Fontevrault included all the studies of the age; a large part of the programme was reserved for dancing, painting, needlework and music.

Two nuns waited on the princesses every day — Mother MacCarthy and Mother Françoise Paris de Soulanges. Luynes states that each princess had a nun constantly in attendance. These simple souls made many blunders and mistakes, forgetting the rank of the girls they were educating, using too much severity and multiplying the demands of convention. Mme de Rochechouart died in 1743 leaving an envied position to Mme Louise-Claire de Montmorin de Saint-Herem; she died in her turn, ten years later, patiently accepting a precarious health and frequent illnesses. Except for a few letters and odd scraps of information we know little of the princesses' life at Fontevrault; Casimir Stryienski has gathered the faintest echoes in a valuable book; however, he gives too much credit to the sayings of Mme Campan whose lies and fabrications are no longer accepted.

details of the arrival have been drawn from documents of the period by M. Célestin Port; the princesses came to the door to greet the abbess to whom they were introduced by the Marquise de La Lande; while the Intendant of Tours, the Provost of Angers, and other high provincial dignitaries, paid the respects due to the king's daughters. Then they crossed the threshold of this austere abode, where little Félicité was to die in 1744, and where her sisters remained for more than ten years, denied all contact with their parents, isolated and under constant surveillance.

Fontevrault had been founded in 1096 by a Breton monk, Robert d'Arbrissal; Pétronille de Chemillé, the first abbess, had endeavoured to rule it with as stern a régime as the monasteries of Cîteaux, Clairveaux and Solesme; the Angevin kings of England had lavishly endowed it with gifts and wanted to have their tombs there. An age of pillage, murder and insecurity, and a relaxing of discipline put Fontevrault under a cloud during the Hundred Years' War and the years that followed. Attempts at reform soon brought in better days; Richelieu himself took a thoughtful and generous interest in the old Abbey.

Marie-Madeleine de Rochechouart de Mortmart, sister of Mme de Montespan, became abbess at the age of twenty-five; she ruled her nuns with firmness and dignity, introduced a feeling for elegance and refinement, and encouraged sincere piety and real contemplation. It was to this great-hearted woman that the princesses were



of her health caused keen alarm; E. Charavay quotes one of Mme de Ventadour's letters: "Another of our little girls at Fontevrault is ill; she has dysentery. We have nothing but troubles in this world, but, thank God, we are made to survive them!" A little while after the little girl fell out of bed and hurt herself badly; and after that she was always weak and delicate.

Being commissioned to paint the princesses, Nattier had to go to Fontevrault; after a fairly long stay he brought back some charming pieces of work, very faithful likenesses which delighted Louis XV and Marie Leczinska.

The Dauphin and Anne-Henriette, separated from their sisters, had a varied and pleasant existence, taking their part in court doings and receiving the honours and marks of respect due to children of the King. The prince's memory was astonishing; after reading about Abbé Choisy's journey to Siam, he received M. de Gencienne, the captain of the expedition, and conversed with him with such a wealth of detail and such accuracy that his guest was full of surprise and admiration. The Dauphin was sincerely pious and took his first communion on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1741; Cardinal de Rohan officiated while the Duc de Chartres and the Comte de Clermont served.

Louis XV gave the Dauphin a hundred louis for his New Year's gifts; and he spent this sum wisely and intelligently; a large part went to charities and good works.

Victoire wrote her mother a short note at the beginning of her stay; and this is preserved in the National Archives.

"I received the little horse you sent me, dear Mamma;" she wrote, "this new mark of your affection makes me happier every day; and my greatest joy is that you are well." Occasionally the princesses showed a trace of arrogance, but it was quickly checked; when Mme Louise said to a maid in waiting who had displeased her: "Am I not the daughter of your king?" the woman cried "Am I not the daughter of your God!" Sometimes their punishments were excessive, as when Marie-Anne-Victoire was shut up in a dark vault called the Niche of the Dead, where she was a prey to terrible fright that was very harmful to so delicate a creature. The gloom, the damp, and the silence of the sinister place, had an appreciable effect on her. And the heaviest penalty seemed quite out of proportion as punishment for a nervous sensitive child.

Sophie showed great natural sweetness, an independent upright character and an obstinacy quite out of the ordinary. Her temper was variable, and she was a past-master in hiding the secret of her thoughts and burying herself in reading and meditation. As for Mme Louise, every one who had anything to do with her praised her sharp clever wit, the soundness of her judgment, her heedless vivacity and a touch of arrogance and pride that she herself tried to suppress. In December 1738 the precarious state

to record the works printed in less than ten years. In the brilliant display at the Louvre in 1737, the most able artists in the kingdom were rivals in talent; visitors were delighted by huge historic tableaux; Jean-François de Troy, Natoire, Restout, were among the best.

Like the Dutch they painted interiors, and their colour schemes were delicate and harmonious; their portraits were life-like, their landscapes conscientious; indeed the French artists of the time excelled in every field, and maintained a supremacy that none could snatch from them; enlightened and wealthy patrons, a fatherly government, a high conception of their importance, stimulated and encouraged them.

Sculptors of all kinds, and architects shared alike the profits of numerous grants, and fulfilled the wishes of a select society eager for beauty; the splendour of France shone across the world and was an inspiration to all. Philibert Orry, Comte de Vignory, the king's chief architect, on the death of Louis-Antoine de Pardillan de Gondin Duc d'Antin, undertook in 1737 an interesting piece of renovation. He protected the best painters and sculptors, took a pride in his friendship with Quentin La Tour, maintained and developed the prestige of the Royal Academy, organized co-operation and altogether stimulated the creation of some outstanding artistic productions.

It was in his salon that La Pouplinière brought Jean Philippe-Rameau into fame, with the performance of his opera *Hippolyte et Aricie* in 1733.

Round about the years 1740—1741 Versailles presented a complex and varied character.

Since the Treaty of Vienna an era of peace had been conducive to great and useful governmental reforms; France was developing, rejecting out-of-date customs, and answering the demands of the moment, working in peace and preserving a high position in the midst of a feverish and uneasy Europe.

Argenson wrote, speaking of Louis XV at this time: "He is a king of thirty, very well-informed; and this last year, during Cardinal Fleury's illness, he has shown that he knows how to govern;" later on he adds: "The king himself has a brain, a good one; he is an honest man and a constant, and he likes honest men."

From the pen of a censorious writer this portrait is extraordinarily valuable, and it contains no element of flattery. From the intellectual and artistic point of view, the kingdom passed through a period of dazzling brilliance; economic prosperity joined with the security of the future gave encouragement to productions of the mind.

Between 1733 and 1741 there was a huge crop of masterpieces; Le Sage published *Gil Blas*, Abbé Prévost *Manon Lescaut*, Marivau *Le Paysan parvenu*, Voltaire the famous *Discours sur l'homme*, *L'enfant prodigue*, *Alzire*, and many other works which added to a growing renown. Piron edited *La Métromanie*; Montesquieu *Grandeur et décadence des Romains*; Gresset *La Chartreuse*; La Chaussée *Le Préjugé à la mode*; one would need a whole volume

## Chapter VI

### MMES VINTIMILLE AND DE CHATEAUROUX, CARDINAL FLEURY'S LAST YEARS AND LOUIS' ILLNESS AT METZ (1736—1745)

THE XVIII<sup>th</sup> century had a passion for domestic life; apartments became smaller, there was less show; daintily furnished and harmoniously proportioned rooms were a background conducive to free and easy conversation; altogether there was an admirable lack of restraint. Nobles and commons were glad to forget social distinctions and escape their tiresome conventions in simple life and the pursuits of literary and artistic circles. They loved the conversation of the enlightened, and courteous discussion on every kind of subject; they welcomed new ideas and heard philosophers rebuild society to a Utopian dream.

The French of this age loved to have rooms full of small things, the walls hung with small tapestries and pictures; they aimed at a harmonious whole, easy to look at, with nothing severe or imposing about it; balance and moderation became their object. In such a delightful nest of treasures as the Wallace Collection shows us, it was a pleasure to converse with learned and intelligent friends. The joys of family life were fully appreciated; children held a place they had not held

## CHAPTER V

Cassanea de Mondonville was appointed chief organist at the palace of Versailles; and he composed sonatas, motets, operas and trios which had a well-deserved success; his talent and the refinement of his taste were well appreciated by Louis XV and the Court; and he took charge of all ceremonial music, earning unanimous approval.

Far from losing prestige, the kingdom of France was winning far and wide the admiration and the envy of her neighbours. From the Rhine lands to the Scandinavian countries, palaces, churches, private houses rose, modelled on those of Gabriel, Robert de Cotte and Lassurance. Their interiors were replicas of Parisian interiors; furniture, ornaments, tapestries and pictures were inspired by French examples; Vienna and Berlin kept their eyes on Louis XV's capital; and neither war nor rivalry checked the spread of our artistry throughout Europe. And a country whose art was in such demand must have been passing through an era of prosperity under the rule of a wise government; for rarely have literature and the arts been exalted in times of political and financial difficulty.

most satisfying picture of just such a society; the Court of Versailles set the standard for Europe and encouraged the spread of beauty in all its several forms.

Far from being content with an existence regulated by the laws of necessity, everyone sought to widen his horizon. It is very pleasant, surrounded by every comfort to spend one's time tastefully arranging one's trinkets, or admiring collections patiently brought together, and welcoming the society of a few well-chosen friends. And the most cherished dream of men of those days was to withdraw from the eyes of the world, and, flinging aside the mask imposed by official duties, to follow where their whims and fancy led them. They had scarcely a free moment but they left Paris for rural surroundings. There among fields and woods and streams they talked to the peasants, interested themselves in botany, and in contemplation of the splendours of nature meditated before this idyllic scenery. A wide gulf separated them from the French of the Great Century; new and intoxicating sensations came to light and enriched the realm of their activity.

Louis XV shared in this moral evolution; it was the answer to his aspirations and to the needs of an anxious soul that was eager for change. If at Versailles he knew how to obey the countless demands of a meticulous etiquette and evaded none of his charges, outside the palace he found a tempting liberty. In 1739 he bought the mansion at Choisy; and he went there frequently and was

a century before; woman had a real influence for good, directing ideas and leading all to her own cult.

With their gay colours and their capricious suppleness of line, Boucher's compositions and Natoire's and Trémolières' were enchanting. There, mythology in subtle allegories told the sports of love; Eros and Venus held full sway and followed their flights on the walls of palaces built by Germain Boffrand and Gabriel.

Along with these there developed the vogue for the Dutch style of painting, a vogue followed by Chardin, Desportes, Oudry and their pupils; the still-life, interiors, and gay landscapes were excellent of their kind, offering a fine workmanship which combined all the age-old merits of French national art with the methods learned from the Dutch.

The same taste was shown in cabinet-work; the warm tones of rare woods joined with bronze arabesques, chairs, arm-chairs and couches with the most delightful contours; all was pleasant — a caress to the eye. Beauvais and the Gobelins created fabrics inspired by the best painters; pale pinks, saffrons, sky-blues, madders and purples formed famous harmonies; appropriate subjects were wreathed in garlands unbelievably beautiful.

To enjoy these countless treasures was needed a society worthy of such a setting, a society with a nice elegance of manners, the heir to an ancient civilization that had reached the height of refinement. And Louis XV's reign presents us with the



Apart from Choisy he was often seen at the delightful castle of La Muette, and he spent the night there in February 1740; one notes with surprise the presence of Mmes de Mailly, de Vintimille, de Chalais and the Maréchale d'Estrées who were invited to stay the night while the men went to the Château de Madrid. There was a like welcome for the king at Compiègne; he loved a forest full of game that promised long rides. In 1740 Gabriel submitted a new plan for the palace, which was completed a few years afterwards. In consideration, however, of the expenses necessitated by trips from the Court, they were curtailed in August 1741. It is claimed that a single trip to Fontainebleau cost more than a million.

On the subject of his frequent stays at Rambouillet, Lenôtre writes: "Every one of his visits involved the necessity of housing and feeding five hundred persons; this number includes out-riders, kennel-men, equerries, grooms, huntsmen or stable-men, who live there during the hunting season and who must be kept by the Duc de Penthièvre while the King is away. When he comes these numbers are re-inforced by a bodyguard of grey or black musketeers, light-horse and police — not to mention the "stages" and the food-supplies, the bearers of which, about twelve in number, are required to carry a canteen on their horses behind them for the king's requirements at the halting-places."

Saint-Quentin assesses the cost of a three days' journey to Rambouillet, Choisy or La Muette at

always adding to and beautifying it. Louis XV's many holidays on this estate are described by Luynes. On 28<sup>th</sup> November 1739 the king arrived early; after showing Mademoiselle the Princess and her attendants the different rooms just as a châtelain would do, very proud of the compliments paid him, he took them into the park, dined in their company and spent some hours playing ombre with the Comte d'Estrées and M. de Bordage. At supper de Coigny attempted to wait on the king, but the latter objected, for he wished to establish an unconventional familiarity. On the next day Louis XV took a walk in the gardens giving his opinion about the shrubberies and astonishing the courtiers by the accuracy and competence of his opinions; he then paid a visit to the ladies and watched a display of fireworks given in his honour by the inhabitants of Choisy. When bad weather made it impossible to go out he attended mass at midday, dined at half past one, began to play cards at about three, and finally at eight he supped, thankful to have a little rest and to taste the bliss of a welcome tranquillity. He used, when at Choisy, to hunt in the Bois de Verrières a few leagues away.

In March 1740, Louis spent several days in one of the pavilions near the lake; he watched boatmen ferrying wine and fish, asked them questions and got on friendly terms with them, sending his officers to taste the wine, and buying two carp; he was standing for so long that he was tired though happy when he returned home in the evening.

At the little castle of Saint-Léger, the property of the Duc de Penthièvre, he frequently tasted the benefits of peace far from all cares among a few intimate friends, contenting himself with simple comforts and enjoying the delights of a solitude he loved. At Marly the number of guests was increased, the laws laid down by his grandfather were relaxed: and on the lists he composed himself were inscribed the names of writers, philosophers, artists and plain gentlemen — commoners were invited to take part in royal festivities. The passion for gambling exceeded all limits and none could tear himself from it, Louis XV setting an example which the majority of courtiers hastened to follow.

Throughout the kingdom ridiculous sums were spent in cafés, gambling-dens, drawing-rooms and public parties. Every class of society fell under the spell, deaf to the warnings and censure of preachers and moralists, and unable to resist a mass madness which spared no-one. Things came to such a point that at the end of 1741 certain games were forbidden by proclamation; and that interdict applied to the royal families on pain of imprisonment for its transgression.

After that the evil was noticed to lessen a little; Louis did not play *passe-dix* any more, had the tables reserved for dice removed, and contented himself with *piquet*, *back-gammon* and *ombre*.

Marie Leczinska, wanting to shake off the heavy atmosphere of Versailles and to have a taste of a

twelve thousand; Louis had more than twelve guests at his own table; there was a swarm of servants busy round the huge castle, filling it with unwonted din; and everything proclaimed the magnificence of the king of France. With all that pomp and show there were bound up political motives; it seemed necessary to work on men's imaginations and surround the sovereign with a dignity that added to his prestige and raised him far above his subjects; it was not mere squandering and extravagance but enlightened understanding of popular psychology. The luxury that surrounds the English throne in our times is a necessity and maintains its prestige; the outbursts of loyal fervour roused by the celebrations at the coronation of George VI are a striking proof of it.

When Louis XVI renounced all this pomp and splendour, believing it no longer useful, and making a jest of the traditions of which he was the guardian and supreme leader, — when he tired of his rôle and began to criticize it, royalty was doomed. Once deprived of the halo that preceding centuries had so wisely set upon it, it just drooped and died.

Save for a few slight modifications Court life went on as usual away from Versailles; however, Louis XV stopped the tedious "booting" ceremony, simplified the demands of a strict formality, allowed his guests to remain seated when he was standing, gave them seats with backs at banquets and did his best to lessen the petty strifes and jealousies between people of different birth.

of Versailles, though even the Prince de Rohan could not attend.

Nevertheless the king had no illusions about the beauty of a woman whose intelligence and good grace he appreciated. And when M. de Luc was writing to Mme de Mailly to ask for a position in the household at Choisy for one of his protégés, he thought it only kind to add: "A word from the beautiful lips of a beautiful lady like yourself will end the matter." On reading the letter Louis XV exclaimed: "Well, as to the beautiful mouth, I don't think you take much of a pride in it."

Another story illustrates the delicacy of Mme de Mailly's attentions, and her skill in winning the king's heart. She saw, one morning, that the king's dressing-gown was ugly and uncomfortable; so without saying a word she chose some fine material and sat up all the next night sewing a new one; and the next morning she put it on the king's dressing-table.

But she was not very strong and her lover's demands tired her out; on 21st June 1740 Louis took her out in a sleigh and went at a great pace; feeling dizzy she had to ask him to go more slowly. After 1739 she introduced to Louis Mlle de Nesle, the future Mme de Vintimille, then aged twenty-six, thus preparing her own fall by the introduction of the most dangerous of rivals.

In June the two sisters supped in his private rooms; and after the hunt the king invited them for long trips in a gondola with Mademoiselle and Mlle de Clermont; they took part in every

freer and healthier atmosphere now and again, asked Louis XV for the apartments of Louveciennes, left empty after Mlle de Clermont's death. The king, refusing to grant her Louveciennes, gave her the choice of Meudon, la Ménagerie, Marly, Fontainebleau and the Trianon; and she chose the last — a lovely place.

So the vogue for country-houses was well supported; farmer-generals were to have their country seats, their castles and their hunting-boxes. All the élite, both artistic and intellectual, met in the hospitable abode of La Poplinière at Passy; a fashion for English gardens succeeded the elaborate displays of a certain Lenôtre, and Hubert Robert began a fruitful career.

From the king down to his humblest subject, not one was insensible to the charms of nature; everyone wanted to possess an estate set amongst fine trees and watered by crystal brooks; everyone loved the waving grasses and the marvellous colours of the flowers; and everyone wanted to change the city din for the thousand murmurings of the fields.

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But in the course of his travels between 1740 and 1744 Louis gave yet further proofs of his misconduct. He made no disguise of the favours his mistresses enjoyed. Mme de Mailly followed where he went and attended all his parties and amusements; Luynes found her name in the majority of Court doings. On the Tuesday of Pentecost 1739 she occupied the second pew at the chapel

into the shade without the least hesitation. She knew how to make the best of her advantages, and tried to govern the king, to insinuate herself into his hidden thoughts, to overcome his coldness, and to learn the secrets of a character difficult to penetrate or even understand.

She had been married at seventeen to Jean-Baptiste-Félix-Hubert de Vintimille, Marquis des Arcs, then Comte du Luc, Marquis de Castelnau in Languedoc, Lieutenant-General and Inspector of Cavalry; but she was not slow in shaking off the bonds of wedlock. A contemporary wrote at the beginning of 1740: "In young Vintimille's household things are going very badly with his wife, Mme de Mailly's favorite sister. He cannot bear her, and is in love with her sister-in-law Mme de Flavencourt and spends all his time at Mme de Mazarin's, which condemns his court to amusements in the neighbourhood of the king!" Mme de Flavencourt said of her sister: "She has the face of a grenadier, a neck like a crane, and smells like a monkey." But these imperfections hardly troubled Louis XV, judging by the development of a sincere love; before her child was born in 1740 he spent whole afternoons with her and even offered her Fleury's apartments.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September La Peyronie, the king's regular doctor, brought her child into the world — a son; she was then occupying Cardinal de Rohan's big room and being visited by the highest dignitaries. When a high fever seized her a little while afterwards Louis endured the torments of anxiety,

amusement at Court, donned hunting dress and went riding, delighting Versailles with their liveliness and enthusiasm.

On Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October Mme de Vintimille was presented to the queen by Mme de Mailly, Mademoiselle, Mme de Mazarin, Mme de Flavencourt and Mme de la Tournelle. At first Marie Leczinska received them kindly enough, but in the end a slight coldness was felt — quite easily understood and needing no comment. Two months later Maurice Quentin La Tour began Mme de Mailly's portrait; it was the favorite's sixteenth picture. On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1740 the king's friends noticed a significant fact; Mme de Vintimille was the only person to whom he gave magnificent New Year's gifts, and who occupied his attention. This lively well-informed woman, whose ugliness and lack of physical attractions is attested by contemporaries, established her kingdom at Court and stole the heart of Louis XV. She was widely read and observant and her conversation was interesting, her knowledge was all-inclusive and her curiosity unlimited; one could not be bored in her company, for her humorous stories and originality adorned the simplest conversations. She amused all who met her, and brightened the places where she was; her ready mind left no room for idleness or weariness.

Devoured by growing ambition, and proud, she was out to play an important rôle; and she neglected nothing in her efforts; she ousted Mme de Mailly, robbed her of Louis XV's favours, and cast her



reference to Mme de la Tournelle, things are much the same as ever; the king's passion is even keener; not only does he see her nearly all day, but he writes to her two or three times a day; all the same he writes just as often to Mme de Mailly, filling his letters with his love for Mme de la Tournelle." The latter was appointed lady of the Court in September 1742, gaining thus greater prestige than either of her sisters.

Marie-Anne de Mailly de Nesle, born in 1717, had married in 1734 Jean-Louis, Marquis de La Tournelle, who died in 1740. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1743 Louis XV declared the Marquise de la Tournelle Duchess of Châteauroux and offered her a title worth more than ninety thousand pounds a year. In February 1744 this gift was confirmed in writing, and this emphasized the fact that the Nesle family was one of the most illustrious in the kingdom, and related to the Bourbons and the greatest families in Europe; the new duchess found herself treated as the king's cousin.

Definitely forgotten, Mme de Mailly had left the court; on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1742 Luynes wrote: "Yesterday I saw Mme de Mailly; she lives in Mme de Ventadour's bedroom at the Tuileries; it's a big, cold, gloomy room. She has grown thin and is always weeping and doesn't seem to have made a match. The life she leads is sadder and lonelier than one could imagine." During Louis XV's illness at Metz in 1744, Mme de Mailly was always in church praying for heaven to grant the king's recovery; the public began to think of her

inquiring several times a day about her health, calling numerous consultations and displaying great unhappiness. Gaspard de Vintimille-du-Luc, Archbishop of Paris, came to Versailles to give religion's aid to his great-nephew's wife. During 9th September the fever suddenly took a turn for the worse. La Peyronie, Sénac and Sylva after consultation prescribed a bleeding, the panacea for all ills. At seven o'clock Mme de Vintimille died without receiving communion, for she lost consciousness immediately after confession. The next day Peyronie, after the king rose, tactfully told him the dreadful news. Louis retired to bed, his face to the wall, told everyone to go out, heard mass in his room and sank into the most melancholy brooding.

Barbier in his Journal notes: "Everyone has been very surprised at the real grief this death has given the King. He has never seemed so affected, and he has displayed his affliction too publicly. Since that day he has seen no-one and has withdrawn for four or five days with only four or five people to Saint-Léger, a little house belonging to the Countess of Toulouse, near Rambouillet. And his trips to Choisy have been put off for some time."

The sovereign still had Mme de Mailly's friendship — a disinterested friendship that he rewarded very meanly; and above all there was still Mme de la Tournelle, another of his first mistress's elder sisters.

So that two years later Luynes could write: "In

in Law's time, and his unpopularity was used as fuel for the fire against the Jesuits. Soon a fourth of Nesle's daughters came into favour with Louis XV. She was Diana-Adélaïde; born in 1714, she had married in 1742 Louis de Brancas, Duc de Villars, popularly known as Duc de Lauraguais.

The Duchesse de Châteauroux was remarkably beautiful, but had a difficult and exacting character; her authority once established she would allow none to rob her of a particle of it; she was a bewitching coquette and highly skilled in the fine art of love. Together with Mme de Lauraguais and Mme de Flavencourt she dispelled the king's gloomy moods, took her place at little suppers, balls and parties, went on the hunts and made herself generally indispensable. Rambouillet became once more the scene of many amusements; convention was once more relaxed, and easy familiarity replaced tedious formalities.

However, the people murmured, and not unreasonably; they thought the license of the king's behaviour scandalous, and never failed to give full expression to their disgust. The out-spoken songs written about the three sisters recall the pamphlets of the time of the Fronde.

At Versailles a party hostile to the favorites was forming; Maurepas was the prime mover; and he spared no pains to put obstacles in the path of Mme de Châteauroux, he encouraged outrageous writings and did his best to destroy an influence he detested and of which he foresaw such evil

more forgivingly — even with esteem — while they covered her two sisters with calumny.

A song, to this effect, was going round Paris; it is worth quoting because it expresses popular opinion; and gave rise to a lot of talk:

*Grand Roi, que vous avez d'esprit  
D'avoir renvoyé la Mailly!  
Quelle haridelle aviez-vous là!  
Alleluia.*

*Vous serez cent fois mieux monté  
Sur la Tournelle, que vous prenez!  
Tout le monde vous le dira.  
Alleluia.*

*Si la canaille ose crier  
De voir trois soeurs se relayer,  
Au grand Tencin envoyez-là,  
Alleluia.*

*Le Saint-Père lui a fait don  
D'indulgences à discrétion  
Pour effacer ce péché-là  
Alleluia.*

*Dites tous les jours à Choisy,  
Avant de vous mettre au lit,  
A Vintimille un libera,  
Alleluia.*

The author of this song at the same time accuses Cardinal de Tencin of infamous practices; this ambitious prelate had gained part of his fortune

Nevertheless, incapable of resisting temptation, he suffered the heavy yoke of love.

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Jean-Marc Nattier has left us vivid and valuable pictures of the years 1740—1745; they illustrate and complete the *Memoirs* of the time in a wonderful way. Yielding to the fashion of allegorical pictures, he painted the Marquise de Vintimille as "Night" with poppies in her hand, while a winged spirit illumined her with a flaming torch.

He painted several impressions of the Duchesse de Châteauroux; the first finished in 1743 showed her as the goddess of Summer, another as Dawn, then a third gave her the attributes of Force — that is a cuirass, a lionskin, a sword and a torch. The same artist immortalized Mme de Lauraguais' features in an allegorical representation of Spring, after giving the Comtesse de Mailly the personality of the penitent Magdalen — a famous picture now in the Louvre. In 1740 he had Mme de Flavencourt pose as Silence, then as Autumn. Though he flattered his models and modified nature, Nattier gives us invaluable evidence about the five Nesle sisters, and enables us to verify the words of Luynes and the Prince de Cröy.

About the same time this man, known as the "painter of the Graces" put his brush to the service of the princesses Henriette and Adélaïde, painting one as Flora, as Element and as a Vestal, the other as Diana, as Element and as a musician. For the Duchesse de Châteauroux' bedroom he had exe-

consequences. On the other hand Richelieu supported the mistress's claims and was rewarded by her gratitude. For it was he who was responsible for successfully negotiating the rise to power of this woman who, before surrendering herself, had always exacted worldly goods and honours just as her pride and vanity demanded. Mme de Châteauroux in residence at Versailles, provided with a considerable income, and surrounded with a halo of fame, misused her power; she received eager homage and was shameless in her triumph. Blinded by his passion Louis XV asked the Duc de Luynes to allow his wife to take part in a huge banquet at Choisy. The sight of the Duchess de Luynes, Marie Leczinska's lady-in-waiting and confidante, at Mme de Châteauroux' table would have seemed to the sovereign a kind of absolution from his faults. Had he accepted the invitation doubtless Luynes would have received the blue ribbon; but incapable of such baseness he refused and had to wait a long time for the decoration he deserved.

But this honest course was hardly ever followed; the courtiers readily had recourse to the favorites; thus obtaining numerous advantages and gratifying their ambitions. It was a critical period in Louis XV's private life; he was dazzled and treading a perilous course; and his duties suffered neglect. But the spectre of the death and punishment reserved for sinners continued to trouble him. P. de Linière's sermons awakened his fears and remorse.

rouge moistened with water that he rubbed on his face and his false teeth, he was the despair of his enemies, and even deluded himself. Important business never prevented him from sleeping, he had a cool head and a warm stomach. One day when he was eating all sorts of unwholesome food, someone pointed out to him that he would fall ill if he were not careful: "It's all right," he said, "my stomach would digest iron."

On hearing this M. de Compo-Fondo, the Spanish ambassador, said: "So much the better, my Lord, for after dinner I have some things to tell Your Eminence that are hard to digest."

Still, illness was not far from attacking his overworked frame; in 1740 d'Argenson noted: "I saw the Cardinal coming out of the king's room — more like a spectre than a man, the mere shadow of a withered old monkey. He is growing thinner before your eyes, his legs and his feet drag, he is just half-alive and failing fast; and he seemed to have something on his mind this evening. M. d'Angevilliers went out soon after him looking just as dead and alive; really the King's Cabinet needed Extreme Unction rather than refreshments at this afternoon's work."

Europe desired Fleury's death; Elizabeth Farnèse, Philip V's wife, hated him and thought his end was near. But her hopes were vain, the octogenarian tricked his adversaries and laughed at their fears. He could have made Fontenelle's celebrated reply his own; Fontenelle paid a call on an old woman of one hundred, and when she

cuted four portraits; that room, according to Pierre de Nolhac, was situated in the attic of the castle of Versailles, above the large suites; later it became the favorite residence of Madame de Pompadour.

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Cardinal Fleury still remained at the head of affairs in the kingdom; despite his age and the fatigues of a long and laborious career he held the helm with a skilful hand and did his best to resist the storms that assailed him. Bernis notes in his *Memoirs*: "Fleury was economical and orderly in his own and state affairs; he had a wise head and loved mildness and diplomacy; his death was a great loss, for he was a zealous supporter of religion and morality."

He added: "Under his ministry the King's Council had more authority and kept secrets better; the great bodies in the State were more obedient, the ministers more respected and France herself more respectable. The Cardinal deserves praise too because he was so reluctant to consider his own family's advancement; if he did obtain important positions and titles for his nephews, it must be admitted that that fortune was never gained at the State's expense and that the graces were pure favours that have always been granted to the better and worthier men." When he speaks of him, he insists on many sides of Fleury's extraordinary character. "Fleury," he wrote, "was proud of his immortality; by means of a little



and whose experience had taught him foresight and careful judgment. It was unfair to Fleury to call him a temporiser, to say that he took too little notice of foreign insolence, and that he was thick-skinned and lacked the warlike virtues which make for the maintenance of national prestige.

The anti-Austrian party wanted that nation completely crushed, they preached "war to the death," criticized the solutions adopted by Fleury just as later they were to rise against the Subversion of Alliances and the diplomacy of Bernis and Choiseul. A fierce and pitiless opposition existed at Paris, which did not cease undermining the work of the king's ministers, blackening them, and showing the perversity of their every action.

This opposition, favoring Frederick II's Prussia, Russia and England, ran riot on the question of Austria; they set every kind of difficulty in the way of the government, hindering their best intentions, spreading false rumours and openly betraying France's interests to the advantage of foreign princes. The opposition's most partizan writers were very welcome in every drawing room and intellectual circle; philosophers, novelists, poets, abbés, all raised the flag of revolution and found fault with authority under the mask of a loyalty that deceived no-one. Under them seethed a mass of pamphlet-writers, spies and scoundrels.

All Louis XV's ministers were assailed by the power of public opinion; some were unable to resist it; they left the party, discouraged and

said: "Death has forgotten us, Sir!" finger to his lips he replied: "Sh! he might hear us!"

In July 1740 the cardinal was at Compiègne, he ate like a giant, worked from six in the morning till six at night, with only a few minutes' break; he carried lightly his eighty-four years.

About 1741 a comic song appeared about the three physicians who looked after France, namely: Richelieu, Mazarin and Fleury, whose remedies had been bleeding, purging and diet; an allusion to Richelieu's executions, Mazarin's taxes and the privations imposed by Fleury.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1743 Louis XV's old tutor became much weaker; he went to mass leaning on two men, exhausted, and torn by a sepulchral cough. He died at the college of Saint-Sulpice at Issy on 29<sup>th</sup> January at a quarter past twelve; his death was announced by the Comte de Maurepas and M. Amelot, and the king was deeply affected by it.

Historians of the nineteenth century have distorted the part played by that great servant of France, that upright, prudent, thoughtful minister, that far-sighted man who knew how to resist the impulse of public opinion and show a wisdom whose issue was always happy.

Many Frenchmen blamed him for his love of peace; they could have wished for a more daring and brilliant policy. They regarded with suspicion this wily old man who preferred to settle the most difficult problems in calm and secret, by diplomacy, who had a horror of war and its consequences,

conceit flourished thanks to the fortune and the positions with which they had been endowed.

A butt for the most unjust criticism, seeing itself constantly offered the English or Prussian institutions as models, having to combat violently antagonistic opinion, conscious of the people's indecision, Louis XV's government had to assume a high-handed rôle whose complexity one can easily guess. And in this rôle he relied on the age-old prestige of royalty and a most praiseworthy administration. The wise and useful reforms realized in a few years are a good enough indication of the king's and his ministers' daring and progressive spirit, and their desire to fit themselves to the occasion and to act with foresight.

These economic and social reforms were enacted in the midst of troubles and anxiety, reforms received with defiance and rebellion; for they injured privileged classes, took away their prized advantages, abolished age-old customs, and cut away the dead and decaying branches that were sapping the power of the monarchy.

The Army, the Navy, town and country administration, finance, commerce, — everything was organized on a new basis with a patience and a uniformity truly surprising.

By the death of Louis XV the kingdom had undergone a great transformation whose practical results still endured even after the horrors of the Revolution. Orry de Vignory, d'Aguessau, Machault, Trudaine, Maupeou and Choiseul were all connected with this transformation; an impartial

disgusted, giving up the task as hopeless. The greatest statesmen of the reign, Cardinal Dubois, Fleury, Bernis and Choiseul, met with a unanimous unpopularity; they had nothing but blame and insult, their best plans were decried and distorted. In the study of French politics between 1745 and 1774, one must be struck at finding such outstanding figures, at seeing the same people in favour year after year, and at witnessing a continuity indispensable for the maintenance of order and the welfare of the State.

Louis XV, often accused of frivolousness and inconstancy, kept a relatively small number of ministers at his side. When he dismissed members from his councils it was in compliance with violent reactions of public opinion, and as a punishment for serious faults, rarely to satisfy the whims of his household.

Most of the grievances formulated under Louis XVI were already in existence in 1744; and they complicated the task of government, which had not only to face foreign problems, and heart-rending economic and financial difficulties, but even to strive against the hostility of huge numbers of its own citizens.

Against it was the Jansenist parliament eager to limit royal power and to direct the country's policy, and jealous of class privileges; the clergy, many of whom had taken to the new ideas; the nobility, retrograde, ambitious and undisciplined; finally the bourgeoisie who applauded the reforms of philosophers and writers whose vanity and

bourgeoisie and people, nothing had been changed since the time of the Great King. After Cardinal Dubois' death Louis XV had publicly announced his wish to govern alone and to do away with the position of prime minister. As a fact, Fleury assumed this last function without receiving the title; his was the responsibility of introducing the young king to affairs of state and of initiating him in the most difficult problems.

Since his youth he had taken part in councils, and he was broken in to political and diplomatic questions; so Louis XV raised his voice whenever he deemed it necessary, basing his opinions on shrewd, discerning arguments. He read foreign despatches, studied official reports, gave his advice on financial, economic and social problems, prescribing remedies. Unfortunately he had not a fighter's spirit, and pleasures enervated him; he had in him an innate pessimism, a sort of spontaneous lassitude that turned him from direct action and made him realize the vanity of things; he placed no faith in men's good intentions, and he discouraged them and did not foster their efforts sufficiently. His indifference and timidity often destroyed the initiative of his best ministers, for he never gave them their share of legitimate hopes.

Louis XV was never blinded by enthusiasm; he chilled the ardour of those who served him just as he curbed their dangerous ideas. His calm reflective mind allowed of no impetuous action; he never acted without careful consideration. Unsure of his court, he aimed at possessing a secret

student of their activities is surprised at the modern spirit of their outlook. All that stupendous task, the benefits of which are felt today, could not have been performed successfully without Louis XV's personal help. He was never in doubt as to the value of his mission, and he preserved intact the authority entrusted to him. He looked upon himself as the descendant of a long line of kings, to whom France owed her growth, her prosperity, and her honours and her power.

If the scandals of his private life impaired the respect attached to his person, if he was lowering himself in the eyes of the nation, he still maintained an unrivalled prestige; for he was at the summit of human hierarchy. No-one could imagine the country without him; the most revolutionary spirits never visualized the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic.

The wave of bitter and violent criticism, that rose in Paris and gradually spread throughout the provinces, took up and exaggerated the usual complaints of the citizens, who were discontented with their lot and beguiled by chimaeras and often unattainable Utopias.

The question of government was rarely raised; the king remained what he had always been in the course of preceding ages; he was severely censured, he was extolled to the skies, according to his line of conduct; people wanted to see him a paragon of all the virtues; everyone bewailed his errors and his failings. Despite Parliament, nobility, philosophical writers, the querulous attitude of

Péronne and Valenciennes, endured the fatigue of long rides and associated with officers and soldiers. Two days later Parliament received a letter in his handwriting, setting out the reasons that had taken him from the court and put him at the head of his armies; that letter was sent by special messenger to the first president Maupeou.

Barbier wrote in his Journal: "The only topic of conversation here is the King, and how he has visited the squares near Valenciennes, the shops and the hospitals; has tasted the patients' soup and the soldiers' bread; he wants to get to know all the officers, and speaks to them very politely. The Duchesse de Châteauroux is going to spend the summer at Plaisance, a lovely residence near Nogent belonging to Pâris-Duverney."

On 10th May 1744 d'Argenson notes: "The king is doing marvels in the army. He is applying himself and making great efforts to learn all he can; he talks to everyone. The troops and the people at Flanders are delighted."

Some time after, the same historian added: "The king has begun to appear at the head of his armies; and one must agree that his conduct is in good taste; it was just as if he had been under a guardian's care till Fleury's death. In the army he has shown himself attentive, brave and very friendly with the men; he is prudent, accurate, hardworking, and, above all, discreet. We do not know as yet what lies under this discretion." When Louis XV received a letter from the Dauphin asking that he too might join the army,

diplomacy, he controlled his ministers, he spent whole days in his rooms, far from indiscreet eyes and the spying of foreign courts, and he lessened the effects of the changes made in the composition of the government. Beside the lively stories of Louis XV's private life, beside his parties and amusements, must be recorded the immense task he so discreetly pursued after 1744. It is not in memoirs of the time nor in contemporary reports that the historian will find the evidence of this work. Luynes, Cröy, Richelieu, Argenson, Duclos, Barbier and Mathieu Marais knew nothing of the king's own policy; it quite escaped them; they were content to note from day to day events which caught their attention.

Their rôle was to recall the details of his life with a perfection of precision; thanks to them we are informed on every public event staged at Versailles, but we do not know what happened in the calm and secrecy of his rooms. A voluminous correspondence helps us in part to fill in that gap in our knowledge; it throws daylight on the king's character, and vouches for the importance of his personal work. Before coming to the second period of the war of the Austrian Succession, it seemed worth while to emphasize Louis XV's part, and show the place that must be ascribed to him.

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In April 1744 Count Maurice de Saxe was appointed marshal of France; on 3<sup>rd</sup> May Versailles saw the king go off to join his army. He slept at



a cloud of pamphlets, papers and songs greeted their arrival; and the people were justifiably disgusted. Maurice de Saxe and Marshal de Noailles deplored such an attitude and did not hide their astonishment or disapproval. At Paris and Versailles Maurepas, in connivance with Marville the chief of the police, encouraged these malicious writings; Marie Leczinska and the Dauphin did not hide their indignation. On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1744 the Duchesse de Châteauroux fell ill at Rheims; the king kept asking for news of her, and seemed very sad; three days later he himself had to take to his bed at Metz. His activities had worn him out, and he had sadly misused his strength through an indiscreet lack of caution; he gave Chicoigneau and La Peyronie, the doctors who had hastened to his bedside, much anxiety; they were ignorant of the cause of his illness, and to combat an obstinate feverishness ordered him to be bled; they were nervous and far from calm, frightened by the weight of their responsibility.

An atmosphere heavy with intrigue and passion hung over the king; the greed of the avaricious was indecent, and there were bitter quarrels among his retinue, — some fearing their favour was at an end, others concerned that the royal conscience should be at rest.

Richelieu, Mmes de Châteauroux and de Lauguais said that they would tend the king and watch over him; they did not allow any dignitary to approach him or speak with him; they had several valets look after him; and all the while they

he was very pleased; but the Dauphin's youth and the nearness of his marriage prevented him from acceding to this noble and disinterested request.

Since 1st April 1744 Richelieu possessed the title of lieutenant-general and was making a brilliant beginning to his office; later he took command at the sieges of Menin, Ypres and Furnes; none was so influential or important, for he enjoyed all the king's favours.

In his ambition he aspired to the position of prime minister, or failing that foreign secretary, and he meant to govern Louis by the agency of Tencin and the Duchesse de Châteauroux. As well as the fulfilment of his military duties he kept up a daily correspondence with Versailles and put down all the intrigues formed against him by his many adversaries, chief of whom was Maurepas. As the king's first Lord of the Bedchamber, Richelieu had the benefit of real intimacy with the king, and cleverly took advantage of it. From that period he was his bad angel, the spirit of temptation and villainy, on the watch for all his weaknesses and doubts; the corrupter par excellence.

Louis XV had decided not to take any women to Flanders, a wise decision which added to and strengthened the king's popularity; Richelieu, fearing a diminution of his influence, let him have his way; Mmes de Châteauroux and de Lauraguais, the Princesse de Conti, the Duchesses of Modena and Chartres went off to Lille. They made a great show there and were insolent in their audacity;

For a long time the Court were uneasy and alarmed, fearing the fatal end; but scarcely was the crisis past when he sent for Father Pérusseau and made his confession with tears of repentance and heart-felt sobbing — a full contrition. When the Jesuit left the room he took the orders to dismiss at once the Duchesse de Châteauroux; and very soon the corridors communicating with Louis' and his mistress's rooms were pulled down. The whole of France was filled with joy at the news of her dismissal.

Marie Leczinska, who was acquainted with the state of the king by La Peyronie and d'Argenson, could not hide her feelings and sent countless messages to Metz, waiting in anguish for news. On 14<sup>th</sup> August at nine in the evening a letter from M. de Bouillon made her fear the worst; she wept for a long time and then went to the Chapel to compose herself, and gave way to violent despair. A few days later d'Argenson told her that the king was asking to see her; she went off at once with the princesses and the Dauphin. The journey was trying, monotonous and difficult, and they were a sad tearful band. On her arrival the queen was at once taken in to Louis XV; she hardly knew her husband, and in her pity forgot her grievances and sorrows; and her generous loving heart lent her words to soothe and comfort him. "I have caused you much grief that you did not deserve," he said; "pardon me for it, I implore you!" His words, spoken in a weak voice as he struggled for breath, showed his real unhappiness.

trembled lest a return to religion might seal their downfall.

All this time Louis was delirious, the shadows of death haunted his bedside, filling him with horrors and nightmare; he had hallucinations, and ever before his eyes were the terrors of hell — terrors he had known since childhood, but revived by the recent scandals of an immoral life condemned by the laws of the Church. In the gloom of evening he fought with visions worthy of a Callot or Dürer; he asked for a confessor and the sacraments in his thirst for peace and consolation.

A prey to the dread of a remorse which never left him for an instant and tortured and tormented him, Louis XV called Father Pérusseau, and committed himself into his hands, praying for the clemency of heaven, promising to mend his ways and abandon his errors and vices.

Mme de Châteauroux and Richelieu, fearing the power of the priests, never slept, and tried every means to win over Father Pérusseau, and overcome his austerity; and they beat futilely against the scorn of a Jesuit who, supported by Fitz-James, Bishop of Soissons, considered nothing but his duty. Neither promise nor threat could turn him from it. On 13<sup>th</sup> August in the evening La Peyronie announced that the king was dying; the Duc de Bouillon, the Lord High Chamberlain and a good honest man, wanted to see Louis die with the Church's absolution; and at the same time he watched Richelieu's and the favorite's desperate attempts to prevent that absolution.

as for a being dear to all or a well-loved kinsman; and Louis XV reached the heights of popularity. Statues, medals, allegorical engravings, pictures and ornaments were a record of the country's rejoicings.

Forty years before the Revolution the monarchy saw a renewal of its prestige and a revival of loyalty. This was due to the sovereign's personal power; apart from his private life, the political decisions of Louis' reign seemed judicious and intelligent. After Fleury's death he made a singularly happy use of his power, setting Cardinal de Tencin at the head of ecclesiastical affairs, granting privileges to the Bishop of Mirepoix, showing daring and gallantry against the foe, dismissing Amelot who was inefficient and protecting M. du Theil, a worthy man and a prudent.

He took an interest in the material welfare of his subjects, deplored the taxes imposed on the working classes but from which the privileged classes were exempt, and tried to improve the lot of the unfortunate. When he came to Paris people admired his elegant bearing and the simple kindly way in which he greeted the crowds through which he passed.

The scandal of licentious living once removed, Louis XV seemed worthy of his subjects' affection, and the future was rosy; the whole kingdom regarded with hope and love their young sovereign so miraculously snatched from the jaws of death.

"Oh, Sire, don't you know that you never needed my pardon? It is only God you have sinned against; it is only God you need ask for forgiveness." Noble and Christian words, but they did not convince the king; again and again he asked Marie Leczinska if she really pardoned his faults; he could not believe in such gentleness and kindness. After taking the sacrament Louis was put into the hands of a doctor called Du Moulin; the prescription of a strong emetic finally removed the peril, and Louis rapidly returned to health. Thanks to Chicoigneau's Journal of 1745, Maurepas' memoirs, and Richelieu's, Luynes' and Barbier's, we know every detail of Louis' illness at Metz. A new era seemed to be brightening the horizon, and the king's recovery was welcomed with joy. After all their gloom and fear the people relieved their feelings with an outburst of high spirits; and the name "Beloved" never seemed more appropriate nor more expressive of popular feeling.

Besides, Louis seemed a different man; he had no wish to have anything to do with Mme de Châteauroux, he received Richelieu coldly, and sought the company of Marie Leczinska, the Dauphin and his daughters; he wrote a touching letter to the Infanta, he called for Te Deums and returned to his former piety.

In the humblest village churches incense was burned and fervent prayers offered up; old peasants told their beads and thanked heaven for the preservation of Saint Louis' grandson. Everyone showed spontaneous joy, a joy as sincere and compelling

latter having forbidden him to leave the court on any pretext while hostilities lasted. Such a failure in the observance of his wishes was unpardonable, and Louis relieved Châtillon of his position as tutor and exiled him in disgrace to his own estates. The Dauphin and the Princesses returned to Versailles after a cold farewell.

Richelieu succeeded in insinuating himself into the king's good graces and tried to revive a confidence he thought forever lost; he also worked for Mme de Châteauroux' recall; for this seemed essential for the maintenance of his own influence.

Louis XV was sad at his adored mistress' absence and suffered at the thought of the insults she had endured; he hoped to be able to make compensation by wiping away every trace of them. Indifferent to the queen, he spoke less and less to her, avoiding her and always looking for a pretext for getting away from her. Deciding to rejoin the army as it passed through Saverne and Strasbourg he refused Marie Leczinska's company, and consented to stay a few days with his parents-in-law, treating her disdainfully and distantly. So she returned to Versailles broken-hearted; she had been deeply wounded and her cup of bitterness and grief was full. It was only stoic resignation that enabled her to bear the events that were to follow.

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On 20th October 1744 Louis arrived at Strasbourg, and the streets were filled with unusual noise and festivity. In his *Memoirs* Valfons writes:

## Chapter VII

### GLORY AND LOVE

1745—1746

After his convalescence the king took up his customary activities once more, regained control of his thoughts and became mysterious, impenetrable and imperious. He thought of the courses dictated by the anguish of his sufferings, of the humiliation demanded by the Church, of the dismissal of Mme de Châteauroux and his passionate repentance; he contemplated the triumph of devotion, became very reflective, but did not give the slightest inkling of his plans.

The exultation of the religious world exasperated him, and he was a little afraid of the interference of the Church in his private life, for that by no means suited his tastes and his desires. In his eyes Marie Leczinska and the Dauphin were the prey of the clergy's ambitions and no longer his; they were the spokesmen of a powerful party whose plans and interests they served. When the news came that Louis was dying, his son left Versailles as if he were going to receive a heritage, bearing with him the good wishes of all who would have been overjoyed at a virtuous prince's accession in place of a licentious one.

With the Duc de Châtillon's approval, Louis the Dauphin directly disobeyed the king's orders; the



However, the war was not finished; Louis XV left Strasbourg amid cheers and acclamations to go off to the siege at Freiburg; he knew how to inspire his officers with courage, perform his duties, and to play his part in the operations which were to decide the final victory. On the afternoon of 4<sup>th</sup> September he had received Marshal de Noailles with the words: "Sir, behold a man restored from the dead!"

He informed himself on every detail, continually questioned the generals and attentively examined all the accounts, gaining a wonderful knowledge of his subordinates' virtues and weaknesses; nothing escaped his curious perspicacity; and everyone was astonished by his remarkable memory. At Freiburg the French troops' valour was put to the test in many engagements; and Louis XV was informed on these by the Marshal de Coigny through the agency of the Marquis de Valfons.

A rash and impulsive soldier, the Prince de Soubise, did not fear to expose himself to enemy fire and had his arm broken; and Louis came to his bedside and gave him most moving marks of his esteem and gratitude. A few days afterwards, Lowendal was seriously wounded; finally the fort put out a white flag and capitulated with the honours of war.

The king's presence became less useful, so he continued on his way to Paris where magnificent ceremonials awaited him. Medals, standards and pennants all had the words "*Ludovico redivivo et triumphatori*"; the Court poets' praises were

"The nobility and bourgeoisie of Strasbourg had formed four companies of horse and two of police, dressed in red with gold lacings, and two more light-horse, red or silver, who went a long way out of the town to meet the king. There was scaffolding with tiers of seats up to the first storey all along the streets where he was to pass, and this was filled with crowds of all the prettiest girls in the province. Garrison troops lined the lower part of the scaffolding right up to the bishop's court where Louis was to lodge. At the door and in the first rooms he found a band of a hundred Swiss, the prettiest children in the town from ten to twelve years old, in the ceremonial dress of the king's guard with their flat caps and ruffs and little painted moustaches; they were delightful. The king very much approved of them acting as his personal attendants. There was a fishpond beneath the king's windows, and every time a line was cast in it one caught beautiful fish from the Rhine. As he got up from table the king heard a lot of hunting horns and trumpets and cymbals; and on asking where the sound came from he was told that it was boats passing with rather a large wedding party; he wanted to see it; so all the company landed on the terrace and went into the big hall before the king's room. There were lovely illuminations in the evening, especially the coachmen's in the Cathedral, which was tastefully decorated with transparent paper in all shades; the hanging strands looked like fairy things; the fireworks were wonderful."

and its glorious past, prepared a dazzling reception for the next day.

The large hall of the Hôtel de Ville was hung with crimson damask adorned with gold lace, and illumined by magnificent chandeliers; the king's room in red velvet with gold tassels had, moreover, mirrors in front of the fire-places. Outside the Place de Gèvre was surrounded by a pasteboard colonnade, painted to look like marble, hung with golden trophies and wreaths. In front of the main door of the Hôtel de Ville an Arc-de-Triomphe, in wood painted with stars, supported a four-horse chariot with a model of Louis XV crowned by Victory. Not far away there was a square fountain pouring wine into stone basins, and fastened to the posts surrounding the fountain were little lamps. The aldermen had aimed at a profusion of every kind of illumination; girandoles and lanterns were hung, closely spaced, not only from the roof of the Hôtel de Ville, but also on the colonnade and all along the Quai Le Peletier.

About two o'clock Louis XV, the Dauphin, the Duc de Chartres and the Duc de Penthièvre, followed by the royal household all on horseback, arrived in the midst of a huge gathering that was bursting with eagerness to see them and welcome them. It was a sumptuous banquet; the guests were astonished at the little sugar figures — a proof of the pastry-cooks' ingenuity. More than two hundred persons were present; behind the king's chair was the merchant provost, while the

hyperboles; they called Greece and Rome to their aid and compared him to Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus; no flattery was too much. He entered his capital at about six o'clock on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> November, and was received by the Duc de Gesvres and the aldermen in great state. Taking his place in a huge coach, Louis XV drove slowly through the Tuileries followed by the applause of a crowd delirious with enthusiasm. A solemn mass was sung the next day at Notre Dame, and the royal family attended, surrounded by a multitude of nobles and courtiers. The monarch, arriving early, sat in the choir and waited a few moments for the queen; she joined him a little after, dressed in gold-embroidered robes, the princesses being in white with magnificent diamonds.

Symphony and song accompanied the liturgy, filling the nave; the best musicians rivalled one another in talent and virtuosity, and nothing was wanting that might enhance the splendour of the festivals of thanksgiving. On his return to the Tuileries Louis dined at his small table; d'Argenson remarks: "The assembly at the Tuileries seemed fine to me; an assembly of the greatest men, and more especially of the greatest ladies, of the Court in the Tuileries' Gallery to see the king's triumphant return as victor in his first campaign." At the same time Marie Leczinska gave a concert in her rooms where she had invited her friends and ladies of honour. Meanwhile the town of Paris, desirous of a display of pomp worthy of its wealth

take their eyes from such a pretty picture; and they talked of it for a long time in the most eulogistic terms.

Time-honoured custom demanded that Sainte Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, should be thanked for all good fortune; so on 17<sup>th</sup> November the king and his family went to the old church for meditation and prayer. In the evening they made another tour of the banks of the Seine, and saw the Tuileries ablaze with thousands of lights, like an enchanted palace from the Arabian Nights; then they returned to Versailles where, in the castle square, were waiting the two hundred carriages that had brought Parisians eager to see the royal arrival.

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The Duchesse de Châteauroux' likely reinstatement into royal favour was no longer a secret; the Metz promises were forgotten; people began to murmur and give utterance to a discontent that escaped neither courtiers nor historians. Even at the time of the siege of Freiburg, Richelieu, taking aside the Marquis de Valfons in whom he had every confidence, had told him under seal of secrecy: "Since Mme de Châteauroux' dismissal the public has thought me quite obliterated, but in fact I have been scarcely touched. They have been writing to one another for several days, and I hope that it will be another Fool's Day." Scarcely had the Paris festivals faded away, when Louis thought of recalling a favorite he could not do without; he

aldermen took their places behind the Dauphin and the Duc de Chartres.

An orchestra of forty played during the slow ordering of the different courses; they were served by waiters dressed in blue velvet breeches with a white shirt and blue jacket embroidered in silver; there was a considerable number of tables, as the municipality had invited the body-guard, the pages and the hundred Swiss guards who formed the king's retinue.

During the dinner Louis was gay and full of jests; apart from his thinness and pallor, all signs of his recent illness had gone. At six o'clock they rose from table to go to Benediction at the Jesuits' church in Rue Saint-Antoine. The king and court walked round Paris till eight o'clock and admired the fairylike illuminations. On the Quai des Théâtres, so Barbier tells us, Mailly's mansion inhabited by the Duc d'Aumont, the residences of the Spanish ambassadors, Bouillon, the Duc de Fleury and the Marshal de Saxe were charmingly lit up.

The façade of the Louvre along the Seine — the one that held the royal printing-press, the medals and coins — held its own with the other buildings; the palace's delicate architecture showed up in all its splendour thanks to numbers of cunningly placed lights. The space between the Pont-Royal and the Pont-Neuf presented an extraordinary spectacle to Parisian eyes; never had illuminatory science fathered such marvels. The queen and the Dauphin and princesses could not

to the ministers present: "Sirs, finish the rest without me." The duchess died on the afternoon of the following day; and the king went to the Trianon refusing the consolations lavished upon him by his friends.

Mme de Châteauroux passed away at the age of twenty-seven, after receiving the last sacrament at the hands of Father Ségaud, a Jesuit. Her death left the field free for the ambitions and intrigues of the Court beauties who wanted to win the king's heart and enjoy his favours. And on 15<sup>th</sup> of the following December another death clouded Louis' happiness; Mme de Ventadour passed away in her eighty-fourth year, lamented by all. The dauphin and princesses felt this loss very keenly. A kind and generous woman, she had spent her time doing good; she had devotedly brought up the king and his son, and then given all her care to all the children who had been entrusted to her. Every day the princesses used to go down to her rooms and spend the afternoon there listening to the conversation of the enlightened, catching the echoes of the Great Age, and seeing through others' eyes a reign whose glory still remained an enviable treasure.



As the negotiations undertaken on the occasion of the Dauphin's marriage with the Infanta Marie-Thérèse of Spain had been concluded to the satisfaction of the courts of Versailles and Madrid, great preparations began in January 1745 for a

implored her in terms of affection to return to Versailles, assuring her of full amends for the wounds to her amour-propre and her dignity, and promising to deal severely with those who had wanted her to go, — that is the Ducs de Bouillon, de Fleury, de la Rochefoucauld, de Châtillon, the Comte de Balleroy and Bishop Fitz-James.

Maurepas alone was spared from this list of proscriptions, laid at Mme de Châteauroux' feet like an act of reparation; however, the culpable minister had with his own hand to take to his enemy a letter inviting her to take once more an envied place at Court. It was a humiliating step for so earnest a man; and still more humiliating for the recipient, for it could not but recall to her unhappy memories.

The interview did not fail to be painful; Mau-repas was confused, and stammered out excuses and protestations, while the duchess listened coldly and disguised her emotion. But she had put a terrible strain on her feelings; and in the night she developed a fever which soon turned to delirium and caused her sister Mme de Lauraguais, who lived in the Rue de Bac residence with her, severe alarm.

As soon as he was informed, Louis showed great distress; he sent the best doctors, demanded frequent news and could not believe in this new and unforeseen misfortune. On 7<sup>th</sup> December news was brought that Mme de Châteauroux, whose fever had never left her, was at the point of death; he went out of the council chamber abruptly, saying



much, and thus incurred dislike on the part of those who thought her silence due to pride and indifference. Mme de Brancas assumed the functions of her lady of honour and tried in vain to distract her with jests.

Richelieu, the first Gentleman of the Bedchamber, went to Orleans and presented Marie-Thérèse with the king's compliments; then Louis XV went with the Dauphin to meet her not far from Etampes, the queen and princesses receiving her at Sceaux, where a dinner was given at the residence of the Duchesse du Maine.

The road from Sceaux to Paris on 22nd of February was packed with the carriages of people coming to see the princess and greet her. In provision for her imminent arrival at Versailles a room was hired at the palace for the huge sum of a hundred and forty pounds.

All sorts of spectacles were provided; as the hall of the theatre at Versailles, begun in 1733, was not yet finished, a temporary hall was established in the covered-in riding school. The Slodtz had done some remarkably good ornamentation, sketching fanciful arabesques with graceful lines, and trying to create an atmosphere simple and harmonious at once.

On 23rd February 1745 Voltaire produced *La Princesse de Navarre*, a lyric comedy with music by Rameau; that was followed by Roy's *Ballet des Eléments*, Lully's and Quinault's opera *Thésée*, and finally a comic ballet *Platée*, a composition of Rameau's which received neither applause nor

worthy celebration of the marriage of the heir to the throne.

Marie Leczinska's and Louis XV's son was of a serious and sober disposition and was generally loved; his outward appearance stood in his favour; he had fine eyes, finely curved eyebrows, a well-shaped mouth; his bearing was elegant but unaffected. He was religious and had strict views on morality, adored his mother whom he loved to be with, and hated the king's mistresses and let them see it; he feared pleasures and festivities and sought the council of upright men and wise; he read a lot and informed himself on all kinds of things. His temperament made him a dreamer, and none could guess his hidden thoughts; Louis XV said that there was a bit of the Pole in this prince whose rectitude was almost a reproach to his father's vices and transgressions. In his scorn of the frivolous life of the Court, and especially Richelieu, he collected round him an opposition of narrow-minded but worthy, honest people. And one of the first places among these was held by Maurepas.

The future Dauphine was nineteen; Jean-Marc Nattier has left us a pleasing portrait of her — a fresh complexion brightened by the use of rouge and cosmetics. Luynes remarks on her liveliness and the quickness of her wit; nevertheless she had no love of jest and word-play; raillery was really distasteful to her; she was very mild, never angry, and speedily checked any sign of impatience in herself. Being shy and reserved she did not talk

provost, M. de Bernage, hoped to get credit for it; but nothing of the sort. He made the mistake of inviting too many guests; so at three o'clock there was an indescribable mass and medley of people filling the halls of the Hôtel de Ville.

"It was impossible to get up or down stairs," said a contemporary; "people swarmed in the rooms, shouting and nearly stifled. There were, in fact, many people fainting, and a few hurt in the scrimmage. For the next week all that was heard about it was about people, nobles and bourgeois who had even died of fatigue, or heat or the cold air when they got outside. There were six buffets very badly arranged and badly stocked; the refreshments gave out at 3 a. m."

The same historian adds: "At these parties the name of a young Parisienne was mentioned — Mme d'Etiolles, wife of M. Lenormant, Lord of Etiolles near Corbeil. She is twenty-two and really one of the prettiest girls in Paris. They say the king saw her hunting in the Sénart forest, and that she has been at all the Versailles balls and parties ever since; which suggests that there is something in it, but nothing marked."

Barbier recorded in his Journal: "Mme d'Etiolles has a good figure and is extremely pretty; she sings perfectly and knows dozens of amusing little songs, rides beautifully and has been educated in all one could wish." Six weeks after the Duchesse de Châteauroux' death no-one could fail to know of Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson's ascendancy, and the place she held in the king's heart, and of the

praise. An engraving of Cochin's gives a faithful picture of the chapel at Versailles on the day of the Dauphin's marriage. The whole ordering of the ceremony had been dealt with meticulously by Richelieu and M. de Bonneval, Intendant and Controller-General to the King for silver, pocket-money and business. Luynes has left a detailed description of the religious pomp, pointing out the hurts and petty grievances arising from severe and narrow conventionality, and the rivalry and complaint and outcry on the part of those who thought themselves slighted.

Two days afterwards there was a masked ball at Versailles. The big gallery, ablaze with lights, afforded an unforgettable sight — tapestries, ornamentation by Charles Le Brun, Girardon's sculptures, panelling and gold; it was a fairy sight, a scene from the Arabian Nights. Four buffets were filled with every kind of tasty delicacy; wine, fresh salmon, trout pasty, poisson au bleu, filets of sole, everything one could wish for; and the supply remained inexhaustible all night.

Louis XV, already forgetful of Mme de Châteauroux' death, and giving up the project of winning Mme de Flavencourt, the only one of the Nesle girls who inspired him with neither passion nor love, seemed happy and took unusual pleasure in the festivities.

On the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> February the municipality of Paris were the hosts in their turn; and they had organized a ball so magnificent as to surpass even the one at Versailles. The merchant

the latter; Richelieu, Bachelier and Lebel had much more influence than prelates or confessors. He was exposed to the beguilements of the most alluring temptations; continual, almost daily temptations, and temptations which few men could have resisted. Though capable of sincere love he never once had been constant in his affections; the Nesle sisters passed through his life like shooting stars; he endured their sometimes difficult characters, satisfied their desires and wept for their tragic end or regretted their exile, but his heart was still open to the call of a *grande passion*. He wanted to give himself to a chosen creature who would understand him, banish his melancholy, brighten a life overcast with so many sorrows; and one who could read his thoughts.

Louis XV reached the stage of wishing for a kindred soul — a soul such as he had never met, and one whose presence could sweeten the bitterness that was in him.

It was a smiling fortune that crossed his path with Mme Lenormant d'Etioles; she was the fulfilment of his anxious yearnings, and she exerted a wise and gentle influence on the heart and the feelings of a delicate, sensitive creature whom the least rebuff or the least wound made terribly unhappy. Coming into his life at a critical period, for twenty years she played a beneficent and useful part with the utmost dignity. She took on a difficult task, and with psychological understanding of a doubtful situation she succeeded in triumphing over plot and intrigue. Though exposed

fears of Maurepas, the Dauphin and Marie Leczinska, the alarm of the worthy and the emotion roused at Court by a sudden infatuation that defeated all their calculations.

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Louis XV was thirty-six years old; he now enjoyed perfect health, spent recklessly, hunted for whole days at a time, had a preference for violent exercise and never knew fatigue or weariness. Physically speaking he was the handsomest man in the kingdom; women admired his regular features, his smile and the fascinating brilliance of his eyes, his elegance and the supple grace of his bearing. His authority and his prestige continually grew; the Alsatian campaign won him well-deserved popularity; the Dauphin's marriage with Marie-Thérèse seemed a far-sighted act of policy; his choice of marshals and generals met with nothing but approval. However, the king was often sad; he no longer loved Marie Leczinska, and he paid her the honours and respect due to her without showing any tenderness or affection; he was instinctively suspicious of his wife's circle, feeling a sullen opposition which actually was non-existent.

But death struck his mistresses; and he saw in this the punishment reserved for sinners, without having the strength to turn aside from forbidden passions or to control the demands of his nature. He wavered between the benefits of religion and the attractions of pleasure, and he finally fell for

devotion, and later his daughter's, he was able to return to Paris and see all set right again.

When he wrote lamenting Mme Poisson's death in 1745, Barbier said; she was one of the most beautiful women in Paris, and one of the most intelligent. Most memoirs of the time are similarly appreciative; they also give accounts of the lady's amorous intrigues which for a long time were the delight of the chronicles of Paris, and of which the most renowned were those with Pâris-de-Montemartel and Lenormand de Tourneheim.

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson was born at the end of 1721 and had a careful education. She was a boarder at the Ursuline Convent at Poissy, and her liveliness and kindness and sweetness won the friendship of all who had to do with her. As a girl she studied dancing with Guibaudet, singing with Pierre Jéliotte and theatrical art with Crébillon and Lanoue; and she learned to put their counsel and advice to a good use. François Boucher and Jacques Guay had the pleasure of teaching her painting, sketching and engraving on fine stone. A familiar of Mme de Tencin's salons and of the Hôtel d'Angervilliers Jeanne-Antoinette met a group of writers, philosophers and artists whose conversation she valued; among those who initiated her in the fine arts Voltaire and Bernis held the first place.

On 9th March 1741 her marriage with Charles Guillaume Lenormant, Lord d'Etiolles and M. de Tournehem's nephew, brought her into a family of the highest rank and one that was well-to-do

to many attacks from high places, and having continually to frustrate the tricks of those who wanted her downfall, she exerted a power that she retained till the approach of death.

Wealth and favour in her eyes were a means of protecting art and literature, of adding to the brilliance and prestige of the French genius, of stimulating the creation of works of art worthy of the highest admiration; her influence upheld Bernis' and Choiseul's wise policy and precipitated the Subversion of Alliances.

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson came from a modest family and never ceased to try to widen her knowledge and experience; adopting the court's elegant manners and customs and avoiding stumbling-blocks and mistakes, she was an adept in the observance of a strict etiquette. Her father was a ship's steward named François Poisson, intelligent but unscrupulous and eager to enrich himself. He was a weaver's son from Provençères who had come to Paris in hob-nailed shoes and looked after the horses in the Duc de Villars' retinue; then, his merits being discerned by the Pâris brothers, he was entrusted with important duties. In charge of the commissariat he grew rich beyond his wildest hopes; in 1725 with the task of supplying food to Paris he reached the summit of a brilliant career. Intoxicated by success he was unable to restrain dangerous desires, and, neglecting the laws of honesty and honour, he embezzled a considerable sum. He fled to Germany to avoid imprisonment and stayed there eight years; thanks to his wife's



beginning of the ball the king gave much attention to a young person of my acquaintance who has more brilliance than beauty. The prince was not put off by her parents, who were in business, for he was tired of the intrigues and ambitions of the ladies of the court; he hoped that a bourgeoisie would think only of loving and being loved. The king arranged a meeting with this girl at the ball at the Hôtel de Ville. Her parents, alarmed but dazzled, consulted me as to their proper course; I kept them to the honourable and right path, and the little girl did not attend the Hôtel de Ville. Nobles of the highest rank came to persuade her mother; but in vain, the appointment was not kept; and it does great credit to the young lady in question that, though she was told that I was the cause, she bore me no ill will. That same night there was the affair at Mme d'Etioles' (now Marquise de Pompadour). That intrigue became thicker from day to day and was not known to the public for some time afterwards. Mme d'Etioles had all the grace, freshness and gaiety of youth; she danced, sang and acted wonderfully well; and had every desirable quality. She loved arts and literature. She was high-souled, sensitive and generous."

Later Bernis added: "The public was astonished by the preference the king showed her; they did not know that this prince after his marriage often used to see her when he was hunting in the forest of Sénart, and that his Majesty's squires spent all their time with her, and that Mme de Mailly feared

as well as admired. That union was her parents' supreme desire and raised her very high on the social ladder.

Her young husband, the sub-farmer-general with a thousand things to attend to, left his wife very free; she took advantage of this liberty to redecorate the Etioles castle, have comedies performed there, and receive Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Crébillon, Voltaire and Bernis. Soon Mme d'Etioles' salon was the meeting-place of an elegant society who admired their young hostess's dazzling beauty, and appreciated her lavish and delightful hospitality and the stimulating light-heartedness of her surroundings.

When it was fine Jeanne-Antoinette walked in the Sénart forest; Louis XV often chanced to meet her there, and dazzled by her beauty could not disguise his feelings. Natural preference took him towards this lovely creature's haunts; and the king made it his custom to go up and greet her and invite her to Versailles, to the great alarm of Mme de Châteauroux who, foreseeing in her a rival, did her best to circumvent the danger. The Pays-Bas campaign put an end to lovers' meetings at Sénart; then Mme d'Etiole's growing favour was confirmed without a doubt by the parties in February 1745. Bernis in his memoirs has related the events preceding her rise. "There was a ball at Versailles in the winter of 1745, and all the beauties of town and court were there. It was the Judgment of Paris; but the lady who was to receive the apple hoped to hold as well the helm of affairs. At the

who played at great ladies; he sharpened his pen and let loose epigrams that were the delight of Paris and Versailles.

As for the princesses, nothing could lessen a natural and instinctive aversion to the king's mistresses. They might preserve the correct exterior demanded by etiquette, but they overwhelmed with abuse the woman who had won their dearly loved father's heart. And around this opposition was crystallized the hatred of all the women who wanted to take Mme de Châteauroux' place, people of illustrious families, all those who were after the honours and benefits attached to the title of the king's mistress. So struggles and internal discord preserved at court an atmosphere of strain and conflict carefully hidden beneath a exquisitely polite exterior.

Politics came into the question too; by subjecting Louis XV they hoped to hold the strings of power, guide the State, change the ministry, have the disposition of positions and nominations, influence diplomacy, get their hands into the treasury and surround themselves with pomp and luxury. Many girls of high birth had dreams of transforming the kingdom; their ambitions served the nobles' ambitions, they being eager to have a hand in affairs, hold a pre-eminent position, satisfy all the petty malices of their caste, and get a taste of the manna of the gods of which the king still had the dispensation.

Mmes de Vintimille and de Châteauroux had wearied the king with the continual claims of

Mme d'Etioles more than any other woman." The evidence we have just cited is indisputable; every phrase rings true, without disguise or passion; the stories of the Marquis de Valfons, of Luynes, Cröy and Barbier tell just the same tale.

Indeed it was at the ball at the Hôtel-de-Ville that Louis XV begged Mme d'Etioles to unmask and flung her his handkerchief. A symbolical gesture in the courtier's eyes, — the king had chosen from the swarm of young beauties around him; henceforth there could be no doubt. Jeanne-Antoinette was invited to Court and took part in its countless amusements and dined alone with the royal family. On 27<sup>th</sup> April 1745 Luynes set it down as a fact; she was known as the king's mistress. The devout, Maurepas, the Dauphin, the Princesses and Marie Leczinska feared the extent of her power and tried in vain to combat it. Boyer, bishop of Mirepoix, tried one clumsy and useless measure; his idea was to remind the king of the promises he made at Metz and his recent illness; but the king's unbending will defeated him.

The nobles were indignant; angry at seeing the Poissons' daughter succeed the young ladies of Nesle; their hostility was open and contemptuous and they bandied about many stories of her. Everyone hoped that a favour which harmed so many interests would be only short-lived; Richelieu saw in it just another phase without important consequences, and prepared the rise of someone he could influence and who would further his projects.

Maurepas cast a sly eye upon this little bourgeoisie

laws of God and man, he had spoken of the husband she had so wantonly abandoned, and wanted to leave Mme d'Etioles' society. But these plans did not last; his scruples were appeased by reason and Bernis followed the burst of fortune that he must condemn on principle; he became one of Louis XV's intimates and received the charge of foreign affairs after he had shown himself a successful ambassador.

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But more important news was added to the talk caused by the rise of a new favorite. Hostilities were resumed; the French army laid siege to Tournai; in the spring, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1745, Louis XV and the Dauphin went to Flanders; they left full of hope and confidence. Six days later a victory at Fontenoy gave rise to general enthusiasm, assured once more the prestige of France, and showed the fearless courage of the royal armies. Marshal de Saxe who was covered with glory said to the king simply: "You see on what victory and defeat depend."

Messengers took news to Versailles every day; Marie Leczinska was told of the Dauphin's gallantry, the king's firm wise leadership, the soldiers' heroism, careless of danger braving death and offering their lives for their country's safety. At the same time the charming Mme d'Etioles was informed of all that took place; tender affectionate letters re-assured her of the king's love and brought her proofs of her power and her influence. These

relations and connections whose spokesmen they were. But Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson on the contrary, a stranger to the customs of the court, brought a delightfully fresh attitude, and a gaiety and ingenuity hitherto almost unknown. Far from neglecting worldly goods, she knew how to make the best of them and to lavish a royal generosity on her own; and she did it dispassionately and with tact and intelligence; she showed herself charitable towards artists and writers, and had with them a valuable and faithful friendship. She had two kindly sponsors to make her debut at court.

Elizabeth-Charlotte Huguet de Sémonville, married to the Comte d'Estrades who was killed at the battle of Dettingen, by her connections with the Lenormands of Etioles was a relative of the future Marquise de Pompadour; she became her confidante and friend, and made good use of a friendship of which she lost the benefits through actions that were foolish and in rather bad taste. Herself broken into Versailles' subtleties and refinements, the Comtesse d'Estrades helped Mme d'Etioles to avoid its snares and the traps it set for the unwary.

Besides that, Bernis taught her certain practices and smoothed away her first difficulties; of an upright character, outspokenly frank, sometimes even to the point of rudeness, he was her friend through joy and sorrow, disinterested always and a wise far-sighted adviser. In the beginning severe in his attitude to a situation that so violated the

victorious army; he reached the Tuileries on 8<sup>th</sup> September, along roads hung with flags from the Saint-Martin gate right up to Carrousel.

Hardly had the royal coach drawn up before the palace steps when Marie Leczinska, the princesses, the Dauphin and his wife came out to meet him. Louis XV kissed the queen and his daughters; and all their faces were radiant with genuine happiness.

About eleven o'clock they all went to Notre-Dame to a solemn service; which, incidentally, gave rise to a violent dispute between the cardinals and the clergy of the church.

In the Hôtel-de-Ville there was a delightful little performance called *Le Retour du Roi* — the music by Rebel and Francoeur, the words by Roy.

The banquet that followed was most sumptuous; Louis XV in the midst of his family and the highest court dignitaries seemed pleased and happy. In a room on the floor above there was an excellent supper given for the Marquise de Pompadour; she had invited Mmes de Sassenage and d'Estrades, her brother, M. de Tournehem and some friends. Richelieu, anxious to pay homage to the king's mistress, and also the Duc de Gesvres, M. de Bouillon and M. de Bernage, went upstairs again and again, hoping to win favours that might do them service; so the lines of the future were mapped out. Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, provided with the brevet to make her Marquise, that the king had sent from Ghent, was enjoying the most coveted pleasures.

missives, eighty in number, bore a gallant device round which was written: "*Discret et fidèle.*"

On 19<sup>th</sup> June Tournai surrendered after putting up a fine resistance; Louis, surrounded by his officers, saw the enemy garrison go out under the command of M. de Braeckel, then he entered the town and went to the cathedral where the bishop at the head of his clergy received him and took the oath; a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving was then performed with singing and music.

A few days later Marshal de Loewendal took Audenarde; this glorious soldier had already made himself famous at the siege of Ghent; he was Maurice de Saxe's rival in glory and received marks of the king's affection.

Now it became necessary for the king to show himself before his newly conquered peoples. The inhabitants of Bruges were loud in their rejoicings; Louis XV was astonished at the warmth of their welcome; at Ghent his reception was more restrained. When the people of Ghent were asked why they were not as enthusiastic, they replied: "For a long time people had talked about 'the mad folks of Bruges,' a name that they deserved, and they would have shown just as much joy whatever sovereign entered their town."

Repeated successes speeded up the campaign; on 12<sup>th</sup> August Dendermonde capitulated; on 14<sup>th</sup> the first trenches were opened in front of Ostend, taken on 28<sup>th</sup> of the same month; finally Loewendal opened siege before Nieupoort. Proud of such fine exploits Louis XV left a conspicuously



Far from taking no interest in the Dauphin, he studied him and tried to understand a character, whose mysteries escaped even his usual perspicacity; he saw in this youth of seventeen the heir to the throne and the mainstay of a kingdom, a prey to the lusts and ambitions of redoubtable adversaries.

In his most valuable Journal, the Duc de Luynes paints an accurate picture of the prince; it is worthy of notice and helps us realize the cause of many misunderstandings between father and son. "I have already spoken," he says, "of the small number of tasks the Dauphin sets himself each day; it seems that he wanted to change his usual routine and have interviews with Mirepoix in the mornings and the Abbé de Saint-Cyr in the afternoons; but his love of being with his wife takes precedence over everything else; and so there is usually not much arranged in the day. When he goes to see the queen the conversation is always lively and gay; he is always at his ease with her; the Dauphine seems to like his company too; the princesses also are often there, and the Dauphin is most affectionate with them."

Further on Luynes adds: "He still shows marked piety; he has been reproached for displaying it too openly, for example when he prostrates himself at the Elevation of the Sacrament, or at the Benediction."

Having no inclination for spectacles, balls, hunting, elegant dinners and amusements, the Dauphin took no part in his father's life; there

On the following Wednesday she was officially presented; a crowd of courtiers and curious spectators thronged the ante-room eager to see the woman who was entertaining Versailles; she appeared at about six, endured their stares and scrutiny and entered Louis XV's rooms where she stayed a short time in conversation. A few moments after the Marquise found herself in the presence of Marie Leczinska; the good queen addressed a few kindly words to her, and won for ever the affection of a sensitive grateful heart.

A lady of the Court honoured with the most exalted titles, Mme de Pompadour accompanied the king wherever he went and was given countless privileges.

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The many-sidedness of Louis XV's life does not reveal itself to historians' eyes without a careful study of his many occupations. It would be a big mistake to believe him dominated by the woman of his immediate choice, taken up entirely with frivolity and seeking to intoxicate himself by an endless chain of amusements.

In the years 1745—1746 his attention was claimed by the gravest problems; at the same time he took an anxious interest in his daughters, looked after their health, and spent long hours amusing and distracting them; he cooked ingenious dishes, gave himself up to tapestry, eagerly throwing off the constraint official functions demanded and freeing himself from the fetters and cares attached to them.

at least there was no trace of disharmony, jealousy or misunderstanding.

After abandoning her fickle husband Marie lavished the treasures of her love on her children, was their guide and helper, and inspired them with good thoughts, without being dominating or imperious. Quentin La Tour, Jean-Marc Nattier, Carle Van Loo, Guillaume Coustou and Galloche have drawn her often with her sweet smile and her assured and gay eyes.

Other artists competed in beautifying her apartments, hearing her advice, working out her tastes, and bending their skill to the fulfilment of the ideas she formulated and explained so clearly and precisely. She ordered pictures on various subjects; at her instigation Charles Coppel painted allegories in which were portrayed the children she had lost prematurely, also subjects from the Bible, the lives of the Saints and the Golden Legend. Charles Natoire adorned the bathroom with pastorals, while Vien represented scenes from the travels of Saint-Thomas and Saint François-Xavier. It was reserved for that excellent master, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, to guide the queen's inexperienced hand and show her how to paint and draw; the Versailles museum possesses a canvas inscribed: "La Ferme" and signed "Marie, Queen of France, made this in 1753." At times Marie took up mural decoration in her rooms with the help of some clever man who helped her understand technical difficulties.

Within these rooms adorned with countless charming things, she received a select society;

were very few points of contact between them; and their tastes and aspirations were quite different. Louis of France loved small gatherings and feared parties and ceremonies; he said repeatedly that he wanted to "vegetate" — a term whose worse sense he did not appreciate sufficiently, and which did him much harm with certain people. From Marie Leczinska he inherited the anxiety to improve his mind by serious reading; in 1745 he studied Sully's Memoirs; and the Dauphine and he discussed the book, preferring it to the fashionable novels and works of fiction.

Mme de Pompadour's presence disturbed his correct mind; he made the mistake of failing to hide his irritation, and Louis XV was deeply wounded by it. In October 1745 the Marquise occupied Mme de Châteauroux' old apartments at Fontainebleau; she gave supper-parties to a few privileged guests, went out very little and received frequent visits from the king while Mme de Lauraguais was consumed with jealousy and aroused real pity.

Life went on with its dark days and its bright — a life whose frivolity and immorality has been much exaggerated. Compared with the courts of Prussia, Russia and Spain, the French Court was one of the best regulated; it deserved full indulgence; many there fulfilled their duties with intelligence and discretion.

The unity of the royal family is touching; Marie Leczinska, the Dauphin and the princesses formed a really delightful picture of intimacy; among these

## GLORY AND LOVE

Robert de Cotte architect, L'Assurance Contrôleur of Versailles. In spite of weighty events that were to follow, the year 1745 remains one of the most important in the reign. Glory and love surrounded the king with a halo of intoxicating happiness; he experienced every kind of blessing, and never found so radiant a sky.

President Hénault was seen there, and Paradis de Moncrif a philosopher and writer, Tressan, the Duc and Duchesse de Luynes, the Comte d'Argenson, Cardinal de Tencin, the Bishop of Amiens and above all Jean-Frédéric Phelipeaux, Comte de Maurepas and de Pontchartain. The latter introduced a freer, lighter element in this austere restrained milieu. His caustic wit and his liveliness and jests amused the queen's retinue and gave him some pleasing success. Secretary of State since 1715, and given charge of naval affairs in 1723, he became minister in 1728. On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1749 a public disgrace cast him into the shade. Marie Leczinska who never took any part in the government was powerless before the king's wishes, and could not prevent the fall of her favorites and protégés.

But it was not the same with Mme de Pompadour; in December 1745 she brought about the exile of Orry, the Contrôleur, sacrificing him to the interests of the Pâris brothers whose claims she was supporting. M. de Rouillé took the place of a blameless man against whom there were no suspicions. She offered M. de Tournehem the charge of directing the king's buildings and held the reversion for a brother, the Marquis de Vandières. At the same time Gabriel's services were rewarded by the Inspectorship of public monuments; the latter had already in 1741 obtained the position of leading architect to the king, with a salary of twelve thousand pounds; while Boffrand was appointed chief engineer of the roads board,

without thinking of any immediate reward. Louis XV loved peace; he had an instinctive horror of war; and he hastened to seize every opportunity of putting an end to massacres that made the battle-fields run with blood. His brave and courageous bearing in the field won him his soldiers' admiration and affection; however, the sight of the dead lying on the cold earth and buildings burned or in ruins, and ravaged fields, filled him with profound sorrow.

The Duc de Luynes has painted him for us as a man whose heart was full of pity for the widows and orphans, and all who waited in vain for one they loved; a man who always thought of the empty places, the tears and sorrows of parents and wives and brothers and sisters. Human life had a great value in his eyes; he wanted to set some limit to warfare and was grateful to Marshal de Saxe for looking after his troops.

As he leant over the beds of the dying or heard them draw their last breath, when he was assailed by the stench of the charnel-house, he realized the ignominy of man's struggles against his fellow man, an ignominy imposed on him by nations greedy to conquer and to plunder, ravening nations ever ready to grind down the weak and seize their goods. After 1740 the king had a remarkable man as his adviser, and fell under a most valuable influence acquiring new insight that was to do him service. Indeed the whole-hearted confidence Louis bestowed on Marshal de Noailles seems to have been very happy; and its fruits were many.

## Chapter VIII

# DIPLOMATIC EVENTS, AND THE KING'S SECRET

(1745—1748)

LOUIS XV's personal politics in the course of the events that took place between 1741 and 1748 and marked the different phases of the War of the Austrian succession, the numerous decisions for which he assumed the responsibility, the control he exerted over his ministers, all go to destroy utterly the idea of an indolent, lazy and frivolous monarch.

The intelligence and justice of his opinions, the farsightedness of his advice in matters of diplomacy or tactics, his interest in affairs of state, and his wish to further to the best of his ability the prestige of France, are plainly revealed in a voluminous correspondence with Marshal de Noailles.

Having been trained on lessons from the past, and benefiting from the experience of enlightened men, it rarely happened that he let himself act on impulse; he meditated and reflected before deciding for any side; he was afraid to venture for fear of fatal consequences. With his obedience to the principles of equity and justice and his sentiment of honour he could not endure such an attitude as Frederick II's, nor understand the King of Prussia's treachery and jealousy and brutality. Very often he had to fight to preserve a balance in Europe



Succession discovered him exercising his functions as lieutenant-general of the Rhine army in 1733. When he was marshal after the siege of Philisbourg, he forced the Germans to evacuate Worms; at the beginning of 1735 he held a very high position at Court. Six years later he became one of Louis XV's advisers, and gave him sincere devotion untinged by flattery or self-interest, and tried to throw a light on the dangers that beset the country, warn him against certain of his household and incline him towards wise and beneficial reforms.

The king, realizing the extent of his services, said to him in 1741: "I shall be glad to hear your views." Noailles replied: "Until Your Majesty chooses to tell me your wishes and intentions and confines me to what concerns the frontier of which you have put me in charge, I shall speak frankly and freely about what has been entrusted to my care and shall be silent about everything else. . . . If, Sire, you wish me to break silence, it is for you to bid it." Then Louis XV exclaimed: "The late king, my great-grandfather, whom I strive to emulate, begged me on his death-bed to take advice on everything, and to try to find out the best and follow it always. I shall be delighted for you to give me your advice; so I unseal your lips, as the pope does the cardinals', and permit you to tell me whatever your zeal and your attachment to myself and to the kingdom inspire you to say. I have known you long and well enough not to doubt the sincerity of your feelings and your attachment to myself."

Adrien-Maurice de Noailles was Anne-Jules de Noailles' elder son; his father was one of the best generals of Louis XIV's reign, and won renown for his ability as a soldier and diplomatist. Born in 1678, the son distinguished himself under his father's command, in the War of the Spanish Succession; then in 1698 he married Mlle d'Aubigné, Mme de Maintenon's niece.

Signal services on the Spanish, German and Italian fronts gained him the esteem and the protection of Marshals de Villars, Catinat and Tallard. He became Captain of the Bodyguard, and, as heir to his father's titles and duties, in 1706 he had a lieutenant-generalship. While commandant of the Catalanian army four years later his reputation was still more embellished by the taking of Gerone.

He became intimate with Louis XIV who, a few months before his death, entrusted him with his papers and this work containing his reflexions on the business of kingship. The Regent appointed him President of the Council of Finance at the age of thirty-seven, and his overpowering popularity roused Saint-Simon to caustic comment. Actually nothing could be falser or more mistaken than the portrait given by this illustrious writer; it was a caricature imbued with violently bitter prejudice.

His place taken by Law, Noailles rose to the ranks of the Regency Council, set up the Chamber of Justice against tax-farmers, and banished the prospect of bankruptcy menaced by scoundrels.

After being exiled with Aguenesseau, under the ministry of Cardinal Dubois, the War of the Polish

see him, and it is there that he wins most respect, especially when he is there to defend the State and its frontiers."

At the same time the marshal advised Mme de La Tournelle not to follow her royal lover, anxious to remove from his presence a woman who reminded officers and soldiers of their master's scandalous life — their master whose authority should have remained on a high plane.

A strong and unindulgent mentor who was not afraid of being exposed to hostility and jealousy, Noailles did not hesitate to denounce everything that was detrimental to the welfare of the State; and he did it with a brusque violence and emphasis that alienated many of the courtiers. Louis XV accepted this unbending attitude without demur, realizing its use; and he reaped the advantages of a disinterested sincere devotion, without resigning his liberty to see and judge for himself.

There still exists a letter from the king to the Comte d'Argenson, the War Minister, in which he proposes peace terms; that letter bears the date of 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1744, and throws a clear light on his perfect understanding of the political requirements of the time, the extraordinary shrewdness of his judgment, and a greatness in him worthy of Louis XIV.

"I am sending you my ultimatum for peace," he writes. "Let us not say that we want peace, but let us desire it as the greatest of blessings, provided that it is a lasting peace. Let us wait and see what is said to us; and let us not make

Raised on 10th March 1743 to the dignity of minister of State, Noailles continued to be on intimate terms with the king, asking him, either in person or by letter, to govern with authority and firmness, to do away with intrigue and favoritism, rewarding nothing but merit, to keep himself from being influenced and led astray; moreover he confirmed him in the theories of absolutism as laid down by Louis XIV.

The marshal was cold and determined and did not hesitate to influence his colleagues — that is to say Amelot, under-Secretary of State in Foreign Affairs, Orry de Vignory, Controller General of the Navy, and Argenson, the War Minister. The military genius of Hermann-Maurice de Saxe, natural son of August III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and of Aurore de Koenigsmark, did not miss his perspicacity; he tried to help to the fore an excellent general and to bring out his great worth.

If he was not inspired with sympathy by the fantastic projects of Marshal de Belle Isle, he was openly scornful of Marshal de Broglie who was in disgrace for having evacuated Bohemia without awaiting instructions; he mistrusted Coigny, and made no secret of his feelings when he met him. Noailles was among the most decided of those who urged Louis XV to leave Versailles to go to the battle front.

In his letters to the king in 1743 he said: "A king is never so great as at the head of his armies; that is the place where his subjects best love to

Another person too played a decisive part in the conduct of State matters and had the benefit of Louis XV's full confidence; that was Louis-François de Bourbon, Prince de Conti. With his victories at Coni and at Mons he showed himself a worthy grandson of the great Condé whose warlike virtues he strove to emulate. His facility and discretion as a diplomat won Louis XV's favour and earned him well-deserved honours. He was a noble of refinement and taste, and his Château de l'Isle-Adam was an enchanted palace, embellished by the arts of the best painters, sculptors and architects; while his Hôtel du Temple was the haunt of an elegant society.

Michel-Barthélémy Ollivier preserves a picture of his hunts and festivities and receptions. With Noailles as his model, the prince was upright, virtuous and discreet. And these qualities found favour with Louis XV, who charged him with the correspondence with the Prussian, Turkish and Polish courts, bidding him sound their intentions and handle information, instead of the minister of foreign affairs who had no knowledge at all of this secret diplomacy.

Many ambassadors wrote to the prince and kept him up to date in all that could interest the king, without making use of the usual channels; the result was often a previously unknown frankness and liberty. Without his knowledge the minister's instructions and decisions were revealed; and Louis XV could judge them and condemn with evidence to back his verdict; thus he was able to

any terms with out allies for the moment. The King of Prussia wants nothing more for himself, and as for the other two, they will have to do without what we want, for their own good. If we are esteemed today, it is because we are feared. We should not appear to want a severe war; that will never bring about the peace that I desire as much as anyone."

What an understanding, what far-sightedness and intuition! Louis XV's character is shown there in all its complexity. A few days afterwards he confided to M. de Noailles: "One sure thing is that I am patient, perhaps too patient, and that I like to see things in a true light, and then make up my mind."

His method was to temporise, negotiate, observe and inform himself, before undertaking anything at all — be it in foreign policy or in administrative and financial reform.

The defeat sustained by Marshal de Noailles at the hands of George II's troops at the battle of Dettingen in 1743 interrupted the frequency of his councils with the king; their correspondence grew less and finally ceased altogether. He became ambassador to Madrid and conducted successful negotiations; then once more a minister at the end of a long career this remarkable man died in 1766, leaving keenly interesting Memoirs which were published in 1777 by Abbé Millot.

and works with His Majesty for a long time; and he is shut up with the War Minister for just as long."

The king's secret, thus shrouded in mystery, was never to be revealed; its use was not such as to be made public; its existence was known to the most ignorant and needed no comment. Louis XV feared that some indiscretion or confidence would put the public on the scent; he used to put to the test those who guarded it, and organized a narrow and constant watch. Jeannel, postal director, was not let into the secret; despatches were committed to a man named Tercier, the head clerk of foreign affairs, with instructions to forward such as came from Versailles but to hold back those from abroad, without awaking the least suspicion.

Tercier was an upright straightforward man and performed his delicate functions with perfect tact. However, Louis XV, knowing that he had accepted some presents, soon let him know of his displeasure. "In the position of confidence you hold," he said, you ought to receive no presents except from me or my agents." But the matter had no further consequences and Tercier continued to enjoy the king's full confidence; he even entered the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres without any of his colleagues being able to suspect the rôle he played with the king.

The mainstay of a secret diplomacy, the holder of the most important charges, and in daily contact with Louis XV, the Prince de Conti never misused his privileges and information. For one example

exercise a constant vigilance over the members of the cabinet without their suspecting how. Conti took his information from tried and faithful agents giving his master invaluable help and retrieving the faults and mistakes committed in broad daylight. As Camille Rousset observes, the choice of ambassadors and secretaries seems to have been judicious; they were mostly equal to their tasks and showed outstanding ability. Understanding that the king read despatches, letters and notes, they tried to be explicit and hoped to receive favours in proportion to their services.

The Prince de Conti's and Louis XV's work aroused curiosity; everyone wondered what could be the purpose of these interminable interviews about which nothing was ever published once the door of the royal apartment was closed. Even on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1748 Luynes was writing: "I noticed that the Prince de Conti was working with the king last Sunday. Everyone is wondering what kind of work it is, and it seems that no-one knows. Some people say that the Prince de Conti has gathered information on various matters and comes to relate it all to the king. He is said to be working hard and to have several secretaries who seem very busy."

D'Argenson asks the same question: "One is continually astonished at the way the Prince de Conti is busying himself in State affairs. The Comte de Saint-Séverin never budges from his study, where they work from four till five o'clock. The prince often takes a huge portfolio with him



table; and they had to be co-ordinated, viewed in the light one cast on another; and everything useful extracted from them — an immense task methodically pursued till the end of the reign.

He could be severe to those he employed, but he rewarded and appreciated their efforts; he was an expert in directing pleasantly but firmly, and he always showed a simple and becoming dignity untinged by arrogance or pride. But these long hours devoted to secret correspondence in no way prevented Louis XV from attending ministry councils with interest and taking his share in their undertakings. Sometimes he would shut himself up for a whole afternoon with some member or other to study and question or advise.

One morning two clerks from Saint-Germain who had come to see the Versailles castle had the idea of going up on to the first storey to see the large hall from the gallery. No-one questioned them and they carried out their wish, but they came down by another stairway forgetting the way they had come; seeing a door at the foot of this stairway they knocked to find the quickest way out. After a few seconds the door opened and they were astounded to find themselves face to face with the king whom they recognized at once; Louis XV, too, showed great surprise. He had been working with the controller general and hearing a knock had got up himself. This story, quoted by Luynes, shows how easily accessible the royal apartments were. How kindly was the

out of many of these prerogatives: when Charles de Broglie received confirmation of his post as ambassador to Poland, the following note was appended: "The Comte de Broglie is to give credit to what the Prince de Conti tells him and not to breath a word of it to a living soul;" that letter was signed by the king.

Camille Rousset has given some study to the complete mystery of this nomination — a nomination that involved neither intrigues nor self-interest, — nor any of the ministers at court. Louis XV loved to disconcert his household's curiosity, avoiding the courtiers' advice and petitions and himself choosing the man who best fulfilled the requirements of the situation. He loved to assert his authority and shake off the yoke that was always being set on him. In love with freedom and solitude he made his decisions in calm and quiet, far from idle words and inquisitive eyes.

Ten thousand pounds was enough for the secret correspondence; after 1866 M. A. Boutaric published large extracts; and after that other collections of experts followed.

Quite apart from letters addressed to Noailles, Conti and Broglie, there were many notes sent backwards and forwards between the king and Baron de Breteuil, ambassador successively to Russia, Sweden, Holland and Austria. Favier, Saint-Priest and Vergennes used to give Louis XV the same kind of information; reports, despatches and all sorts of news accumulated at the king's

de Lesdiguières and de Biron; attached to this title was the use of the Château de Chambord and the revenue from the island of Tobago.

A few days later Louis XV made Marshal de Coigny a hereditary duke, and rewarded Marshal de Broglie; as for Count Waldemar de Loewendal, he received promotion to marshal for his conduct at Fontenoy and the siege of Berg-op-Zoom.

The accusation of ingratitude that is so often formulated against Louis XV cannot stand before a sincere enquiry into his actions between 1742 and 1744; soldiers, ministers and diplomats all had a large share in his favours, and saw themselves rewarded for their devotion and their deserts.



Three serious problems ruled the foreign policy of this reign: the ever-burning question of Austria, the expansion of Prussia and the greed of England; added to these were numerous difficulties arising from different sources. The Emperor Charles' death on 20th October 1740 had kindled a fire which was not to be extinguished; this wise and ambitious man's will left Austria prosperous and extending far into Italy and into Flanders.

Thanks to the negotiations of the Pragmatic Sanction, Spain, Russia and Prussia guaranteed to respect the king's daughter Marie Thérèse's title to this heritage. She had married François of Lorraine and assumed the duties of her position from the age of twenty-three, showing a dauntless courage — even heroism, — spent her life defending

surveillance over the palace, and how trusting people still were!

If the king instinctively rejected recommendations and favours, he still had to sacrifice to customs he hated and abhorred, and was forced too often to bend himself to the requirements of a nobility who were accustomed to enjoying considerable advantages in all professions, and to ousting men of greater worth who had no rank or titles.

His weakness led him to accede to the wishes of favorites and courtiers; but on the other hand, thanks to him many scandalous abuses were abolished, and Choiseul's wise reforms in the navy won his approbation.

Marshal de Saxe said to an officer who came to ask a favour of him: "When I ask it I shall not obtain it; I have the right only to have men killed — not to reward them." When that fine soldier himself was loaded with honours far beyond his hopes, he owed them entirely to his heroism and the magnificent services he had so faithfully rendered.

A general who has gained such distinction and such glory must above all win battles; and he could afford to fail to appear at Versailles. Louis XV never showed severity to people who failed to appear before him; and in that he differed from his great grand-father.

In 1747 Maurice de Saxe received the title of field-marshal-general, a title which had been granted previously to the Marshals de Turenne,

thousand Frenchmen from Prague —, Chevert's defence of Prague, and the cession to Prussia, of the Silesian duchies and the principality of Glatz.

By the Treaty of Worms, signed in November 1743, England, Sardinia and Saxony gave their alliance to Austria. The confederacy of Frankfurt replied to this by uniting Sweden, Prussia and France against her. When Louis XV and Marshal de Saxe invaded the Netherlands at the beginning of 1744, Charles of Lorraine entered Alsace; he had to abandon it to go to the help of Bohemia which was being threatened by Frederick II. The French troops who were in control of Munich set Charles VII up there once more; but he died on 10th January 1745. His son Maximilian, timid and peace-loving, renounced the claims which had stirred up so much conflict; he came to terms with Marie-Thérèse at Füssen, and promised his support to François of Lorraine who was elected emperor as François I. The sole beneficiary of this long and laborious campaign was the king of Prussia; the Treaty of Dresden guaranteed him the possession of Silesia and sanctioned a policy of force and brutality; however Marie-Thérèse regained the equilibrium necessary for the maintenance of her prestige; she had the power to combat her terrible neighbour's territorial ambitions, and check his advances.

France seemed to have gained very little; in the pursuit of her policy of crushing the house of Austria, she was working for Frederick II, putting her forces to a bad use and turning in a vicious

herself, and employed every weapon with wonderful skill and determination. Her father had scarcely drawn his last breath when ambition broke loose; everyone wanted his share in an empire that was too large and badly defended, and which lacked national unity.

Sardinia and Spain claimed Milanais; Augustus III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, had his eye on Bohemia; Charles-Albert claimed the imperial crown and was supported by France who returned to the traditional policy of Mazarin and Louis XIV. Frederick II, in his eagerness to seize the duchies of Silesia, invaded them on 10th April 1741, won the battle of Molwitz and came to an understanding with Marshal de Belle-Isle.

In May 1741 the Nymphenburg treaty raised a formidable coalition against Austria; France, Spain and Bavaria took up the offensive simultaneously; England watched results and did not hazard her future, and Prussia rallied to the support of the enemies of the empire. Marie-Thérèse, a real heroine of romance, resisted despair; on the 25th June she took the crown of Saint-Etienne amidst acclamation; and the Hungarians shouted: "Let us die for our king, Marie-Thérèse."

It serves no purpose to dwell on facts that are well-known; in November Belle-Isle seized Prague; in January the Elector of Bavaria became Emperor under the name of Charles VII, then the Austrians invaded Bavaria, took Munich and negotiated with Frederick II. 1742 saw Belle-Isle's noble retreat — he had succeeded in removing more than fifteen

missed d'Argenson whose warlike views were familiar to him and hastened the meeting of the congress at Aix-la-Chapelle. At this congress England's voice was imperious, for she hoped to gain the mastery by intimidation; and she waved before them the threat of an army of thirty-five thousand Russians who arrived at the Rhine to support their claims. But the Russians were checked by the Marshals de Saxe and de Loewendal before Maëstricht, and the preliminaries to peace were signed on 20th April 1748 by Austria, Spain, Prussia, Italy, Germany, Sardinia and France.

As Bernis notes, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle gave nothing to France; she agreed to restore her conquests, and renounced her claims in the Netherlands. On the other hand the Infante Don Philip received the duchies of Parma, Plaisance and Guastalla; the King of Sardinia's frontiers were marked by the right bank of the Tessin; Frederick II kept Silesia; the Republic of Genoa, the Duke of Modena and the United Provinces had their original frontiers restored to them.

This peace, though a noble and impartial one, raised up violent opposition in France; the people said "what a stupid peace!"; everyone thought that a high price had been paid for poor results.

Jacques Bainville's view in the following lines is a reasonable one: "When the principle of a war has been bad, how could the peace be a good one? All that we had gained by once more taking up against the Hapsburgs a policy which was found to be favorable in the seventeenth century was

circle. Louis XV, imbued with anti-Austrian feelings, felt however no antipathy to Marie-Thérèse; on the contrary he mistrusted the Prussian king. Bound by respects for old theories inherited from the preceding reign it seemed dangerous to him not to continue the time-honoured struggle against the empire; that mistaken view was shared by the main body of his ministers and approved by the nation.

The Netherlands campaign was marked by brilliant successes in the course of the years 1745—1746; victories at Fontenoy, Raucoux, Lawfeld, and the taking of Maëstricht proved the French armies' superiority.

D'Argenson, the war minister, was making preparations for a vast and fantastic scheme; after driving the Austrians from the Peninsula he intended to unite the Italian princes once more in a confederation under the presidency of the Pope. But events frustrated his plans: a new piece of treachery on the part of Frederick II allowed Marie-Thérèse to send reinforcements to Italy, and they defeated the Spanish and the French and the situation turned in Austria's favour. Part of Provence was invaded by the Austrians who threatened Toulon and Marseille; but the relief of Genoa recalled them to the other side of the Alps and delivered France from grave anxiety.

At Culloden the Pretender Charles Edward Stuart, James II's grandson, was completely defeated by the Duke of Cumberland. Whereupon Louis XV, anxious for a peace in which to recuperate, dis-



the danger of alliance with Prussia, and the serious import of English ambition. These were lessons that cost dear, and had their consequences — consequences which ended in the Subversion of Alliances through Bernis' and Choiseul's wise diplomacy.

In approving the radical change in France's foreign policy, Louis XV showed a keen understanding of new needs and broke away from out-of-date theories of monarchy.

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Parallel with continental campaigns between 1742 and 1748 there were some considerable conflicts in the colonies and on the sea. England, mistress of a huge empire, having gained the supremacy over Spain, Portugal and Holland, was extending her domain over the most distant lands; a powerful fleet gave her power to establish her conquests, to add to them and to cast her eyes on those of weaker peoples. By the help of a European war she hoped to lay hands on some of the French colonies, destroy our power in India and in North America. Finally in 1744 the naval and colonial war, so long checked by Walpole's and Fleury's prudent policy, broke out.

On the Northern coast and in the Mediterranean unsuccessful battles revealed our navy's inferiority. The naval engagement at Toulon had no results, the seizure of Louisbourg by the English, their successes at Lorient, at the Iles des Lérins and Cape Finisterre affirmed a redoubtable supremacy.

to have strengthened Prussia and destroyed the balance of Europe. The party that gained from the fault France committed in 1741 was Frederick II. Even during the campaign he had held the situation in his hands, lending us his assistance as long as it suited his interests and not a moment longer. Now he would have still more authority because of his added strength. From that moment it became obvious that Prussia wanted to take Austria's place in Germany, and that that ambition was no longer inordinately great. So that if France persisted in her anti-Austrian policy she must work for Frederick II!" It is difficult to find fault with the part Louis XV played in the long expensive War of the Austrian Succession; he followed a path that had been traced out in a century before, and followed ends that seemed necessary for the maintenance of equilibrium in Europe; and the public fully approved his policy.

History is grateful to him for repulsing Belle-Isle's and Argenson's fantastic ideas, preventing a general upheaval, and working for peace. If the results of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle seem inconsiderable, it should not be forgotten that the abandonment of the Netherlands destroyed for ever a cause of perpetual political insecurity, and a hive of dissension.

No-one could predict the character of Frederick II, the treachery, greed and unreliability undreamed of by England, or the firm and courageous attitude shown by this princess of twenty-two. That war told the folly of a struggle with Austria,

even fantastic views that were always worthy of admiration.

Dupleix who was governor of Pondichéry in 1742 fostered valuable enterprises; he wanted to develop the French possessions in India and continue Dumas' and François Martin's work. Three years later Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais went back to his former position of governor-general of the Iles de France and of Bourbon. A forerunner of Gallieni and Lyautey, he succeeded in transforming the appearance of these neglected regions, rousing the native's enthusiasm and stirring up a recrudescence of activity and work. After establishing arsenals, hospitals barracks and a naval dock-yard, he infringed the Company's routine methods and reaped a reward not of praise but of blame. But for Orry's and Maurepas' enlightened protection he would have fallen, despite his courage. Dupleix, when besieged in Pondichéry by English warships, called on him for assistance; but after that, on 21st September 1746, the taking of Madrid finally set the two governors at loggerheads. La Bourdonnais wanted to give the town up to the English for the sum of eleven thousand pounds, while Dupleix planned to keep it; the latter won the day.

La Bourdonnais was falsely accused and had to leave India; he gained his liberty after being imprisoned in London, only to be sent to the Bastille for three years.

Thanks to Paradis' energy Madras successfully repelled her enemy's attacks while Dupleix was

As a consequence of the resumption of hostilities between France and England the India Company saw itself menaced; the French possessions at Chandernagor, Pondichéry and Mahé had to sustain violent conflicts. Dupleix' and La Bourdonnais' heroism made up for the lack of military and financial resources and the carelessness of Louis XV's ministers who had their eyes on the Rhine and who, apart from that, had no other means of immediate action. To judge Louis XV's government one must understand the methods of colonisation in practice in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century; by so doing one avoids making undeserved reproaches.

The India Company was composed of merchants and financiers, and their aim was the exploitation of rich territories and the improvement of prosperous lands. They wanted to gain wealth, curtail their expenses, increase the financial yield of their plantations; they had no desire whatever for noble or disinterested works. Vast areas came within their sway, and they administered justice there, supported an army, offered certain advantages to the colonists, and enjoyed complete freedom of action.

Nevertheless the India Company fell under the king's suzerainty; he controlled its administration, supplied functionaries, and defended it in case of war. There was an undercurrent of hostility towards the merchants and men appointed by the Versailles cabinet; some were concerned only with their own interests and their prospects were mercenary and limited. The rest had modern, daring,

LOUIS XV AND THE MARQUISE  
DE POMPADOUR. VARIOUS FESTIVITIES

1748—1754

EARLY one cold December morning Louis XV anxiously awaited news of the Dauphine. The shadows of death prowled round a silent Versailles, and the air of desolation recalled days of mourning, gaps that could never be filled, and the memory of beloved friends now no more.

Since his childhood Louis XV had been forced to endure the sight of the ravages of illness in those he loved; many were the burials and many the funeral ceremonies that he had attended, and his sensitive heart had suffered much grief and anguish. He had had to bow, powerless, before the blows of Fate that so cruelly struck the royal family and carried off, all in their prime, his parents, uncle, aunt, brother, children, and his best councillors and friends, and then had snatched from him a mistress he adored.

Now yet another affliction visited him, wakening feelings of infinite sadness; wounds scarcely healed were opened once more, and no hope shone in that gloomy day. For some days Louis had seen his son's eyes heavy with despair; he could feel the torture his sensitive soul was undergoing; and he knew how sincere a love and how great an

defending himself at Pondichéry. The peace of 1748 put an end to hostilities and the Company was constrained to the loss of Madras.

One curious thing — the Indian war awakened no interest in France; Voltaire said that the object of colonization was to furnish middle-class tables in Paris, London and other big cities, with more spices than one once would have found on princes' tables. Philosophers, writers and moralists were openly distrustful of conquests in exotic lands; public opinion took a lukewarm interest, and ministers saw in them only a source of expense. Apart from Maurepas and Orry they were not enthusiastic about our great colonials' efforts. Louis XV seems to have shared the ideas of his age; he feared new conflicts with England; European problems occupied his whole attention; and the admirable sacrifices of a certain La Bourdonnais and a certain Dupleix escaped his notice.

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As the era of administrative, financial, commercial and political reform did not open till about 1750, it seemed advisable to take up the story of Louis XV's life till that date. After the importance of the War of the Austrian Succession has been emphasized, and that of the naval and colonial wars, and a light has been thrown on the sovereign's personal rôle in times of stress, the acts of his daily life will seem less frivolous; rash judgments and calumny will give way, and truth dispel stories which belong to the realm of tale and fantasy.

Louis XV's approval by pointing out the real advantages of a marriage that was desirable as well. M. de Loss, the Saxon envoy to Paris, displayed discretion and intelligence in his diplomacy; he had a number of interviews with the king and knew how to establish Marie-Josèphe in the king's good graces.

The Dauphin was more difficult to win over; neither the Marquise de Pompadour nor the marshal had any influence over him; he feared them and was coldly aloof. But as he heard everyday the praises of his destined bride's merits and virtues, he succeeded in accustoming himself to the thought of marriage; and in the end he submitted to the nation's wishes, though he could not forget the beloved wife he had just lost.

Marie-Josèphe came by Strasbourg, through Belfort, Langres and Troyes; she responded as well as she could to the cheers that greeted her, and her lovable grace won everyone's heart. When presented to the queen, not far from Versailles, she spoke with affection and courtesy, assuring her of her desire to find favour, and begging her to be kind and tell her of her faults and errors. When she received the magnificent presents Louis XV had sent to her, she exclaimed that the only thing lacking was a portrait of the king.

Of a cheerful and lively disposition she soon overcame the Dauphin's misgivings and rapidly won his liking. On a courtier's telling her that Madame the Princess Royal was serious and Mme

understanding united the Dauphin and his wife, drawing them close together and making their life a thing of beauty. After a difficult accouchement Marie-Thérèse died at eleven o'clock on 22nd December, unanimously regretted; her household wept unrestrainedly, and nothing was heard but praise of the little princess whose gaiety had delighted the Court and city but yesterday. For three days there was a continual stream of people coming to pay her well-deserved homage. The burial took place in great pomp and splendour at the basilica of Saint-Denis, and was attended by huge crowds.

The Dauphin, plunged in grief, declared that he could never be induced to marry again, and rejected the claims of the State as to the need for a successor to the throne and the duties his rank demanded. However, ambassadors planned in secret; it was impossible for the prince to remain a widower without a male heir; Louis XV could not for a moment consider a policy which would have had serious consequences.

The King of Sardinia refused his daughter's hand, when asked, so as not to annoy England. Madame de Pompadour wished the choice to fall on Marie-Josèphe of Saxony, daughter of Frederick-Augustus III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and of Marie-Josèphe, Archduchess of Austria.

In agreement with her great friend, Marshal de Saxe, she exerted herself to overcome Marie Leczinska's hostility towards the child whose father had usurped her father's throne, and to win



the music poor, but they did not dare to express their opinions openly for fear of Madame de Pompadour who was the patroness of the authors of this performance.

The Dauphin and the Dauphine liked music and attended numerous concerts both sacred and otherwise; but they rarely went to theatres or balls. In the retirement of his rooms the Dauphin used to play the violin, or organ or harpsichord; he sang well and could appreciate the talent of the best composers of the time. This taste he inherited from his great-grandfather, and he developed it along most intelligent and enlightened lines.

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Now, with the consummation of a marriage that appeased his anxieties, Louis XV's happiness was almost unalloyed. Mme de Pompadour afforded him joys almost unknown before; and he spent all-too-brief hours with her, enamoured of her radiant beauty, her grace and vivacity, her impulsiveness, her lively rebellious gaiety and her encyclopaedic knowledge. He was never bored in her company, and not a hint of weariness or misunderstanding ever came between them.

It was the Marquise who inspired him to protect art and literature, managed to overcome his distrust of poets and philosophers, and encouraged him to lavish expenditure whose results were the glory of his reign; she was quick to discern real talent, to employ it and stimulate its activity; and her patronage remained one of the happiest. With

Adélaïde more lively, she said that she would go to the former for advice, but the latter for amusement. At the time of her arrival in France she was sixteen years old, having been born at Dresden on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1731.

Two pastels by Quentin La Tour in 1749 preserve for us her sweet face with her lovely eyes, her pretty mouth and fresh complexion, and her friendly, unassuming air.

Luynes wrote on the day after she arrived: "The Dauphine seems very lively, and at the same time very sweet; she likes to have something to do all the time, and during her journey to Saint-Germain she almost always wanted her ladies with her. She gave them very little time off for rest, and was delighted on reaching the castle to have a game of quadrille. That seems to be her favorite game. She knows how to shoot, she used to go on shooting-parties even at Dresden, but she does not know how to run a horse. At Dresden she was accustomed to gamble after supper. Here, just now, she will have to accustom herself to a different kind of life; the Dauphin, as I have already said, likes neither company nor amusements. She seems to be very much afraid of displeasing the Dauphin in any way."

The marriage was celebrated with the usual pomp, and was preceded by several masked balls and theatrical performances. On the afternoon of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1747, the Court was present at a ballet by Mion and Roy called *L'année galante*; Rameau's admirers found the words empty and

twelve people had to get into a hired coach amidst much laughter and exclamation. Louis XV had a passion for these nocturnal escapades where he was free from the restraint of convention and from curious eyes, and amongst friends of whose discretion and devotion he was assured.

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In June 1747 he left Versailles for the scene of military operations where Marshal de Saxe awaited him; and a series of victories unrolled before his eyes, while Loewendal covered himself with glory at the siege of Berg-op-Zoom. Two months after, the king returned to Paris, greeted by the cheers of an enthusiastic populace, and heard the speeched of the constituted bodies.

The end of the year was marked by the establishment of a lottery of thirty millions, to close on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1748, and made up of many shares. Each ticket was valued at five hundred pounds and could not be divided. An annual drawing and easily appreciated advantages poured money into the State treasuries; but economists deplored an institution whose immorality and illegality seemed scarcely worthy of a country like France. The order for the establishment of the lottery was drawn up at Choisy, a favorite resort of Louis XV.

The king had scarcely recovered from the fatigues of his journey to the Netherlands, when he showed still more activity. He went to La Muette to inspect the new buildings erected beside the

the aid of M. de Tournehem, director of constructions to the king, then of her brother the Marquis de Marigny who inherited the position, she gave a kindly and generous reception to the flower of masters of the period: Boucher, Natoire, Quentin de La Tour, Pigalle and Van Loo.

Not only did she raise enchanted palaces, and furnish them elaborately, and order paintings, sculptures, tapestry and ornaments; she loved equally to receive in these delightful surroundings the chief men of letters of the time: Voltaire, Cr billon, Bernis, Le Blanc, Piron, Marmontel.

Plays, history, novels, poetry and science, all interested Mme de Pompadour; her library was widely eclectic, and it was from there she drew the varied knowledge which enabled her to take her part in every kind of conversation. Unlike the Nesle sisters the Marquise never wearied the king with Court gossip and tales; she begged no favours for a privileged caste, and was content to direct the benefits and honours at her command on her father and brother; she used her influence with skill, discretion and fine diplomacy.

For Louis XV's amusement she increased the numbers of theatres and festivities. Even in the spring of 1746 the king went to the ball at the Op ra in Paris in company with Mmes de Pompadour, de Rouvre and d'Estrades, and MM. de Duras and de Soubise. He got into the hall unobserved, and the public did not suspect his presence; but on his return he often had amusing adventures; one evening when a carriage overturned, more than

pictures effaced in 1736 for they no longer answered to the wishes of the day; the gallery itself was pulled down in 1750 with the ambassadors' stairway and the medal room. On Thursday 21st December at five o'clock was performed Dufresny's *Mariage fait et rompu*, interpreted by Mmes de Brancas, de Sassenage and de Livry, and MM. de Maillebois, de Croissy, de Nivernois, de Duras, de Clermont and d'Argenson the son.

Immediately after this play there followed an act by Rebel and Francoeur after the words of Montcrif; it was a pastoral called *Ismène*, and its dances revealed the celebrated Hesse's talent. The Marquise shone in the principal rôle and received applause from one and all. Also there were more instruments added to the orchestra, flutes, violins, oboes, bassoons, while Jélyotte, the singer, gave an indifferent performance on the 'cello, guitar and harpsichord.

As director of performances the Duc de Vallière carried out a sometimes difficult task excellently well. A little later Louis saw a performance of Voltaire's *L'Enfant Prodigue*; Mme de Pompadour was delightful in the rôle of Lise, playing opposite the Duc de Chartres who took the part of Rondon.

Thanks to Richelieu's and d'Argenson's patronage, Voltaire had found favour at Court again; his plays were often chosen for the king's private theatre; some welcoming them sympathetically, others with suspicion. As the king's historiographer, gentleman in ordinary of the chamber, with a seat at the Académie Française and honoured

court-yard; and then set off to Fontainebleau where the forest full of game detained him quite a while.

During this late autumn he loved to walk on the thick carpet of leaves that deadened his footsteps; he loved to survey the architecture of great trees partly stripped of their leaves; and he loved the silence that enveloped him, the feeling of peace and quiet, and the air laden with heavy scents. Often at a gallop he would plunge into the mysterious depths of the pathways, pursue some beast to bay, out-distance those who followed him, stop to listen for the distant call of the answering horns, the plaintive cry of a bird, or the countless noises of nature.

Then he forgot Versailles and the Court, he breathed freely, liberated from every shackle; an intensity of living gave him a feeling of strength — a strength that was almost savage. On certain days he experienced the desire to exhaust his physical resistances and to break them down; and he would ride for hours and hours and stop only when fatigue overcame him.

In December 1747 the Dauphin and princesses were invited to a hunt in the Verrières woods; and no plea could excuse them from the long fatiguing rides in which the king took such a delight.

On his return to the palace he enjoyed an excellent entertainment in private theatricals organized by Mme de Pompadour. The theatre was set up in the little gallery, which had received a series of pictures from the brush of Pierre Mignard,

his philosophical ideas nor his attacks on religion, exclaimed that she did not wish to meddle in an affair which was not her concern in any case; in her inner heart it may be she was not displeased at the troubles of an alarming man who was the protégé of a perverted censorious set, and narrowly associated with the fortunes of Richelieu and Mme de Pompadour. Finally after all sorts of procedures the parody was forbidden by M. de Fleury's orders.

In April 1748 Louis XV showed himself highly pleased with the musicians of the private orchestra; MM. de Campierre, Ferrand and Dufort each received a snuff-box adorned with a miniature of the king; the others had plain snuff-boxes, while Moncrif, as author, was rewarded with a repeater-watch.

The new hall for the private theatre was opened six months later, with *Le Retour d'Astrée*, Rameau's music and Bernard's words; after that Campra's *Tancrède* was performed.

Mme de Pompadour and the Duc de la Vallière skilfully varied the programmes, spaced them with dancing and entr'actes, choosing from the French and Italian repertoire with a wide eclecticism, and not hesitating to mix old and modern composers; and their taste was excellent. From the musical standpoint they gave a big place to Jean-Baptiste Lulli and de Campra, and to Rameau; and they discerned original talents at a time when the English public's hostility had raised a cabal against Händel which was not to die down till the master

by the friendship of the great, the author of *Mérope* well knew how to take advantage of the material benefits of his popularity. He believed himself Corneille's and Racine's successor, he had the highest opinion of his dramatic talents and was pained when he saw them sometimes unappreciated. Ambitious and athirst for respect and laurels, he pursued applause and could not endure the slightest criticism.

When *Semiramis* was performed before Louis XV and a few guests on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1748 at Fontainebleau, it was not well received; everyone discovered weak patches and verbosity in spite of its high-flown language and strictly classic lines. Italian comedy-writers a little while later announced their desire to perform a parody of it, as they were accustomed to do with dramas and comedies of some importance. Voltaire was furious when he heard about it; parodying *Semiramis* seemed to him a crime and a sacrilege, an assault on his fame; he had no idea that *Le Cid* had been turned to farce without lessening his prestige.

However, so as to put an end to the Italians' projects, Voltaire wrote two long letters, one to Maurepas, the other to Mme de Luynes, complaining bitterly of his disrespectful treatment, and outlining a defence of his own genius, scarcely veiled by a remnant of modesty. Not content with these steps, the clever diplomat at the same time sent a letter addressed to Marie Leczinska, begging her to render him a service indispensable for his peace of mind. The good queen, admiring neither



of the festivities that the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century delighted in. Elysian parks with great symmetrical trees, thickets filled with flowers and birds, rocks where crystal waters flowed, harboured the sports of love, and the heedless flights of youth whose only care was liberty to enjoy themselves. *Joie de vivre* burst out like a triumphal song, and combined with the beauties of nature; exquisite happiness and languid tenderness enveloped people and things and bathed them with its radiance.

Love haunted the air, while the blue waves of an unknown sea rocked gondolas laden with flowers, musicians and young lovers. A peace that was almost intoxicating drew man from the cares of life, and plunged him in a dream world where his fancy had free flight.

If illustrious artists retraced for our eyes' delight such scenes, if Watteau created a world entirely his own; if François Boucher revived a gallant Olympus that Anacreon would have loved, they were but answering to their contemporaries' wishes, materializing aspirations easily discernible in the customs and practices of the times. Philip of Orleans' costly displays at Bagnolet and La Muette are found in Watteau's and Lancret's pictures. In the same way Boucher and Fragonard drew inspiration from the delightful festivities so numerous in Louis XV's reign. Venetian carnivals with marvellous illuminations, pastoral merrymaking amid lawns and streams, fancy-dress parties in some park with bewitching statues; between 1740 and 1765 there was a profusion of entertainments directed with

produced his two national hymns *Judas Maccabaeus* and the *Occasional Oratorio*.

The plays performed showed just as discerning an intelligence; comedies and tragedies were from the pen of the best writers; among the moderns Voltaire, Crébillon, La Chaussée and many others no less celebrated were pre-eminent. These shows, reserved for a very few privileged guests, were Louis XV's delight; it was there he tasted a precious relaxation, contemplated Mme de Pompadour's grace and charm in every kind of part, listened to music perfectly interpreted, and lived in an atmosphere of story and unreality which he loved and which dispelled his gloom and preoccupation.

He loved comedies and shunned tearful tragedies with their high-flown tirades; his preference was for simple story or fairy-tale, for he hated moralizing on the stage, and expected amusement not sermons, which were more suited to the church.

But the marquise protected sacred as well as profane music; she had Lalet's motet *Dominus regnavit* and Mondonville's *Magnus Dominus* performed before Louis XV; Luynes notes in his Journal how moved the king was by these sublime works; he listened with concentration, attention and respect, noting the finest passages and appreciating the smallest details.

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Watteau's, Pater's and Lancret's compositions, Charles-Nicolas Cochin's, Moreau the Younger's, and Fragonard's engravings give some picture

So the guests immediately left their places and followed the musicians; they went down the two terraces and entered a shrubbery arranged as an open-air theatre by the help of canvas back-drops.

The Duc d'Ayen presented himself before the king disguised as the god Pan, and paid him a compliment, while Mme de Marchais represented Flora, and Mme de Trusson Victory. After that the spectators were delighted for half an hour by a ballet, the music being by Lelio-Riccoboni, the words by Blaize and the dances by Deshayes.

The children who had performed in this entertainment led the company all along the prettily illumined canal, where floated a gondola lit up with countless coloured lights; the pure, cold night air, the calm of the surroundings, the fairy lights reflected in the limpid water, all reminded one of a fairy-story that must come to life.

After going into a little wood Louis XV was complimented once more by M. de La Salle attired as a shepherd. Masks and dominoes were distributed to each of the guests, the children were disguised as pierrots, and the company made its way into a huge ballroom, most ingeniously arranged in the midst of the forest. The king did not want to dance, but stayed till three o'clock in the morning, so obviously satisfied that the marquise was well rewarded for her efforts.

Such outlets were indispensable. Louis XV was grateful to Mme de Pompadour for ceaselessly searching new diversions for him, dispelling his

consummate art. Louis XV took an ever-increasing pleasure in them, sensations of delight in the presence of beautiful and by no means bashful women aroused his sensuality; the restraint of a strict convention was relaxed and he could escape far from the cares and anxieties of everyday life.

In this desire to escape realities there was a kind of moral necessity, observable in most men of the time, especially artists and the intimates of Versailles. The passion for festivities came from the theatre, which had an undeniable importance in intellectual and artistic development; and it enables us to understand the creations that saw the light in the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI.

At the beginning of September 1748 Mme de Pompadour invited Maurepas, d'Argenson, de Puissieux, Saint Florentin, the Duc de Luynes and a few special guests to a party destined to run its course in her castle La Celle. The invitation tickets bore the plain inscription: "Admit bearer;" underneath was the announcement that supper would be at ten sharp. On 3<sup>rd</sup> September the Marquise welcomed her royal lover with elaborate preparations that enhanced the natural brilliance of her beauty. As the supper ended a large number of musicians was seen enter, playing the violin, the oboe, the cello, the bagpipes and the bassoon; they took their places round the table, and Mme de Pompadour rose and sang in a crystal-clear voice a hymn to Night, with scarcely a line but sounded the praises of the king; and she ended with the words: "Come, come follow me!"

In his memoirs Luynes writes: "The next day, the same indecision, new delays, and the Dauphin threw himself at his sister's knees and begged her to yield to his entreaties, — adding a few touching words about the kindness of the king who could have ordered her tooth to be drawn while they held her down by force, and who, on the contrary, was willing to wait and sympathize with her weakness; finally he begged her not to waste their father's valuable time."

Louis XV who was present at this scene could not make up his mind to give the order, and temporized. Victoire said she was sorry and thanked him and proposed to have the tooth drawn, and he refused. They were at the height of indecision when Marie Leczinska came into her daughter's room on the way back from chapel. She took a look at this picture, at once comic and tragic, showed astonishment at the king's weakness and persuaded the rebel to have the thing done. M. Mouton was summoned hastily and set to work; Louis XV held one of Victoire's hands, the queen the other, and Mme Adélaïde held her legs; everyone was pale, anxious and uneasy.

When it was all over the patient exclaimed: "The king is indeed good; for I feel that if I had as unreasonable a daughter as I have been, I should not have endured her so patiently."

Victoire used to receive an allowance of about one hundred thousand pounds for her pocket-money, her clothing and her linen; and the Marchioness de Duras was given the charge of watching

black moods and surrounding him with infinitely varied entertainments.

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The year 1748 soon marked two new losses; at eight o'clock on 27<sup>th</sup> July, the little princess, the Dauphin's daughter, died in spite of her household's anxious efforts to save her; the poor little body lay in state at Versailles, and then was brought to the Tuileries where the Feuillants kept watch over it; then it was put in the vault at Saint-Denis, while the heart went to rest at the Val-de-Grâce.

Two months later Mme de Mailly passed away in repentance and remorse, showing a truly edifying example of Christian humility.

Parties and festivities, and preoccupation with affairs [of state never prevented Louis XV from doing his part as a father both kindly and pleasantly. He adored his daughters and showered them with all they could wish for; he had a special love for Victoire who had recently come to live at Versailles after a long sojourn at Fontevault.

An amusing story recorded by Luynes gives a lively idea of his simplicity and patience. In April 1748 M. Mouton, the princesses' dental-surgeon, had decided that one of Victoire's teeth must be extracted at once; when the Faculty confirmed his decision Louis XV agreed. The day fixed for this operation fell on Easter Sunday. Poor little Victoire, terrified and trembling with fear, postponed the fatal moment from hour to hour; so the afternoon passed away without her being able to make up her mind to it.

M. Thury, the son, and Cassini and Condamine, observing an eclipse of the sun; he asked all sorts of questions and displayed a most lively interest in astronomy and even astrology.

Very often he read the accounts given by the Academy of Science; since 1699 this body had been lodged in the old royal apartments at the Louvre, in sumptuously decorated rooms where once Henry II, Henry IV and Louis XIII had lived; and there it set out its jars and anatomical specimens, a stuffed camel or so, and the skeleton of an elephant. The liberal easy-going monarchy welcomed all academies in its old palace.

The Académie Française, and the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres were side by side in the ground floor of the square courtyard in the wing built by Lemercier; the Academy of Painting and Sculpture took up the present Apollo gallery of the Square Hall where the Salon was held, the Hall of the Caryatides, and various other rooms; the last were partly pupils' studios and models' rooms.

There were twenty-six lodgings between the gallery and the water's edge, and artists of merit enjoyed liberal hospitality there, and received honours and remunerative charges from the king. In the same way in the old Louvre resided the High Council, established in 1723 to take the place of Parliament.

Since 1744 the Marquis de Marigny, director of the king's buildings and brother of Mme de Pompadour, had submitted to the king the plan for a museum fully opened to artists and students.

her dress and regulating her expenses. Louis XV had given her M. Hardion as tutor; it seemed an excellent choice; he was a worthy man, a member of the Royal Academy, and lived the whole year at Versailles looking after the king's private library and his precious stones; apart from that he spoke five languages and was very learned.

There were thousands of valuable and beautiful works in the royal collections; since 1728 part of the books had been kept in the Hôtel de Nevers, the others remained at Versailles under M. Hardion's watchful care. French ambassadors and envoys to foreign parts searched tirelessly for rare editions and valuable manuscripts to give the king, well knowing that this was the best way of paying court to him and ensuring his approval. M. de La Bastie forwarded some from Rome; the Comte de Froulay discovered valuable ones at Venice, the Marquis de Villeneuve at Constantinople, Marquis de Bonnac in Switzerland, Comte de Plelo in Denmark. Agents of the India Company and missionaries sent along curiosities; then Falconet bequeathed the king eleven thousand volumes, and his example was followed by numbers of courtiers who gave him very fine libraries.

This wealth of which Louis XV was so proud was classified and analysed in an accurate catalogue carefully compiled by Hardion. The king took a special interest in scientific books, he kept *au fait* with discoveries, and spent hours in his laboratory with the enigmatical Comte de Saint-Germain. In July 1748 he spent a whole morning with



inherited his passion for construction — a passion which Mme de Pompadour exemplified perfectly, and which allowed French art to be revealed in all its splendour at Bellevue, Crécy and La Celle, in numbers of castles and domains that she was always visiting and beautifying. And together with a love for the plastic arts was combined a well-proportioned, intelligent and wise liberality.

His son's economical nature astonished Louis XV, who could not grasp the idea that a young vigorous man should not have the wish to support a splendid hunting retinue, erect enchanting dwellings, give dazzling parties for his friends, and enjoy all the pleasures that good fortune had to offer.

A few days after the *jours gras* of 1748 he asked the Dauphin what he thought of doing to amuse himself at this time of rejoicing; the Dauphin replied: "I should be glad to go to bed at ten instead of at eleven as I always have to do." Louis XV was astounded, such a response was utterly incomprehensible; compared with his intense life, where work and pleasure went hand in hand, the existence of the heir to the throne seemed gloomy and monotonous, that of a monk rather than a prince. However he was careful not to criticise the peaceful practices of a son he dearly loved.

On 29th August 1750 the Dauphin and Dauphine's joy reached its height with the happy coming into the world of Marie-Zéphirine; Louis XV welcomed the news with a satisfaction

This plan, approved by Louis XV, was realized in the Luxembourg Galleries. Access to the treasures of the royal collection was given moreover to all who asked.

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Louis XV's character reveals a sweetness, kindness, benevolence and patience that has no lack of examples. He gave his support to reforms likely to improve the conditions of the poorer classes, he encouraged liberal measures and protected artists with intelligence and discernment. He was never seen impatient or out of temper, and never was harsh to servants; no-one was easier to work for, and no-one more generous when the occasion arose. Knowing that d'Argenson had spent considerable sums as war minister and gone beyond the limit of his means, the king paid the four hundred thousand pounds that greedy creditors were demanding from him, and granted him a lodging in the Louvre.

For the upkeep of the royal houses at court twenty-five millions a year were needed, and the king's attentions were kept occupied by the huge expenses of new building operations, re-decorations, and the bounties bestowed on his household.

So in 1749 he had to set a curb to his love for building; the war budget claimed fifty millions, the marine twenty millions in addition to the aforementioned budgets; and there was always the fear of new and grave European conflicts.

It was from his grandfather that Louis XV

impartial pen? Louis XV would have subscribed to it, Mme de Pompadour would have added a few words of tenderness and gratitude; the whole of France would have discerned in it the ring of perfect sincerity.

De Cröy's memoirs remain an inexhaustible well where the historian always recognizes a good faith as denuded of flattery as of systematic slandering. About 1749 this shrewd and intelligent man appeared at court; he was well able to take part in the king's trips and to be invited to suppers and private theatricals; he took countless steps to court favours, and went ahead without platitude or servility. Admitted to Louis XV's friendship, he set down his impressions every day, faithfully registering what he had seen and heard, showing no astonishment at the changes of humour of which he was at times the victim, and accepting the whims of the great, and adapting himself to them.

Thus on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1750 de Cröy went off to l'Ermitage at Versailles, the Marquise de Pompadour's property, lying between the present Rue Maurepas and the Trianon.

"We had a bite," he writes, "with the king and Mme de Pompadour, who always dined there on hunting days. The king seemed to me to be just as much in love as ever, and displayed it openly. We saw all the beautiful flowers of the household, and the rare plants, including a Sensitive Plant in flower, and all this pretty place which," he adds, "Mme de Pompadour's influence has paid for, is always being added to."

noted by the Ducs de Luynes and de Cröy; five years later the child came to a premature end.

Being of a sensitive affectionate and grateful nature, the king could not but bitterly regret the loss of Maurice-Hermann de Saxe, that faithful and glorious marshal whose victories had shed a brilliant light on the history of the reign. Speaking of this loss, sustained on 30th November, the Duc de Cröy wrote in his *Memoirs*: "He had faults on the moral side, perhaps even on the social side, which together with the envy that meets all great men had made him many enemies; but if in that he paid nature the price of faults from which so few men are exempt, it can be said with truth that as a perfect general he had no faults.

"The clarity and fairness of his views, his firmness, and even the admirable courage with which he executed them, leave nothing to be desired on that side. He was a born soldier and tactician, all his life he had studied and meditated, even amidst his greatest dissipations; and what I think is most truly heroic in him is that I have seen him so often rise not only above death, but above defeat and suffering. At Fontenoy, bitterly wounded, for a long time he watched a more than doubtful battle without showing the least alarm; though unable to stir from his bed, he gave the greatest orders with unmistakable firmness. There are few men who have maintained that firmness like him; and it is that which marks out souls, and makes heroes."

Could one find a finer eulogy from a truthful and

entirely at her disposal, and almost full disposal of everything else."

A few days afterwards he wrote: "The king took us to Trianon to see the hot-houses, the rare plants, flowers, poultry-yards, fowls, herbs and vegetables — all most tastefully arranged; Mme de Pompadour had given the king this taste, and it cost him a lot."

Louis XV had a personal love of nature, he had a connoisseur's appreciation and spent enormous sums for the upkeep of parks at Fontainebleau, Versailles, Choisy, Marly, La Muette, Compiègne, etc. . . . At Choisy on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1752 he amused himself watching the gardeners at work; then, in company with his guests, he began to cut down a shrubbery, taking the bill-hook in his hands, unaccustomed to such work, and toiling all day with both skill and energy.

His departures from Court were frequent from about 1749 to 1754; and they were accompanied by an atmosphere of rest and relaxation; the Dauphin showed himself a little better disposed towards Mme de Pompadour; the king's five daughter's lent charm and animation to the places they visited with their huge retinue of ladies. Louis XV had a real predilection for the castle at La Muette on the edge of the Bois de Boulogne on the Passy side.

That dwelling had already enchanted Charles IX, Louis XIII and the Duchess of Berry; set among woods full of game it was much sought after by hunters; and those who were invited there

Her influence brought about the disgrace of Maurepas, that incorrigible author of scandalous epigrams, whose hatred of the king's favorites exceeded the limits allowed, and who by reason of an outrageous insult addressed to the Marquise had well deserved the exile that fell upon him.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1749 the most senior of the ministers disappeared from Versailles to reappear many years later. Richelieu, Louis XV's former confidant and friend, also fell into disfavour, without being able to destroy Mme de Pompadour's power.

Everyone wanting to fulfil his ambitions at court and find the king's sympathy had to go by way of the marquise.

"Mme de Pompadour," de Cröy notes on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1751, "being the only means by which to secure my credit, and being then at the topmost pinnacle of favour that ever any mistress has been, I asked audience with her, and begged her to reinstate me in the king's favours, and have me once more invited to join his trips. She said that I could have my name set down and she would say a few words in my behalf, as she had already been kind enough to do once before; and even in the evening the king seemed to regard me in a different way, and the next day, after joining the hunt for the first time for a year almost, I was among the first named to sup in the king's private rooms. We were twenty-four in all, the number of favoured persons increasing according as she gave them her protection, for she had all that

After 1752 she resigned herself to the thought of death, and accepted the signs with courage; but she knew how to maintain her prestige and authority, strengthening them in two ways.

The first consisted in demanding new honours that brought her respect and esteem, blotting out the memory of her origin and making her the equal of the highest families in the kingdom. Thus on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1752 she obtained the title of duchess with the prerogatives, ranks, precedence and advantages attached thereto; she enjoyed the right of sitting in the king's presence, and henceforth none must fail to show her respect.

The second method consisted in legalizing her presence with the king, in receiving the Church's approval of it, and doing away with any idea of scandal by replacing the mistress by the friend. A difficult task in which she failed in the end. For Louis XV, being inconstant and sensual, was always the object of the intrigues and calculations of everyone who wanted to set another favorite in Mme de Pompadour's place.

He did not fall a victim to the Comtesse de Choiseul's piquant charm; but the episode could have had unexpected results if the future Duc de Choiseul-Stainville had not removed his kinswoman at the marquise's wish.

Except for a few courtiers no-one wanted to see the nominal mistress cast off in favour of some unknown woman. De Cröy adopts the general opinion when he notes: "The marquise was good and clever, and the king's infidelity had been

found a freedom and simplicity quite without restraint.

After dining and taking a walk the king used to converse with his ministers or hold a council; at nine o'clock he went to his games in the big drawing-room, astonishing onlookers with his quickness, his accurate eye and his luck; at ten o'clock there would be a magnificent supper; at two everyone retired to his own apartments. The same practices prevailed when he went to the other resorts, above all in the delightful Bellevue Castle where Mme de Pompadour received him on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1750.

The marquise encouraged these excursions, in her anxiety to keep her royal lover from intrigues at Versailles, and to distract him and stifle the remorse which was always coming upon him; and also to guard against her rivals. "I found the marquise more despotic than ever;" wrote de Cröy on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1752, "nothing was done without her having a hand in it. There was no sign that Mme de Choiseul, young, lively and rather pretty, caused her any ill-will."

And yet for a year Mme de Pompadour had not been fulfilling her part as the king's mistress because of ill-health; the malady was beginning its work of destruction and slowly undermining her exquisite body; already the first symptoms of tuberculosis were apparent; and soon she began to cough blood and was unable to climb stairs without her heart beating violently; she was soon to pay the price of her faults with terrible fears.



her return to religion. The marquise fasted, stopped appearing in fine clothes in public, received ambassadors at her tapestry-work, attended services, and showed an edifying piety.

Nothing could have moved the king more; he himself had a fund of sincere piety that had remained intact despite the outbreak of his passions. He attended Divine Service with unfailing attention; read prayers all through, and showed real concentration. His knowledge of the ritual was such that he used to embarrass priests and prelates by putting difficult questions to them. At the passing of the Host he always used to get down from his coach and fling himself to his knees in the mud or the dust.

Louis XV wanted Corpus Christi day to be celebrated with pomp and magnificence, and he followed processions tirelessly, astonishing his household by his scrupulous fulfilment of every Christian duty. None could speak slightly of any question involving religion before him. The censorious attitude of writers, philosophers and freethinkers filled him with pity and disgust.

The question of the After-world continually preyed on his mind; the idea of death hardly ever left him, ever recurring in his conversation with often painful details. When Henriette lay dying on 10th February 1752, he went and took Holy Communion together with the royal family, the officers on duty, and the court ladies, each one holding a candle in his hand, and brought the viaticum to his daughter who took communion with fervour,

talked of, everyone had spoken on her behalf; for, since there must be a mistress, they were better content to have her than others of whom they feared worse. They had more for which to reproach her in the huge expenditure on unimportant things, and the consequent disturbance to finance. Everything else stood in her favour. She protected the arts and on the whole did good service and not bad."

The public criticized her extravagance, the sumptuary expenses that were always piling up, the luxury with which she surrounded herself, and the importance of her house; papers and handbills spread often wrongful rumors and fostered a hostility of which none could fail to be aware. In 1750, it was pointed out, she had paid three hundred thousand pounds for the domain of Sèvres, a domain which brought in an annual income of thirty-six thousand pounds, and added to her huge estates. Many other examples were quoted, and everyone was indignant to see so much extravagance at a time when the state of the kingdom's finances called for unpopular imposts and taxes.

When Mme de Pompadour was declared court lady to the queen on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1756, Versailles and Paris could not hide their astonishment. It seemed a singularly audacious step to offer Marie Leczinska the services of her husband's mistress; and only a generous and submissive wife could have accepted such a mortification.

A little later there was the surprising news of

her old friend Mme d'Estrades and tried to establish her in the king's favour. Warned of this danger the marquise acted promptly; on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1755, as Mme d'Estrades was going to rejoin Louis XV at Saint-Ouen, M. de Saint-Florentin sent her a letter from the king; she was thanked for her services at court and invited to leave Versailles without delay. An intelligent and well-informed man, d'Argenson realized that he had destroyed himself; less than two years later, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1757, he went into exile. The king had not sacrificed him to revenge Mme de Pompadour, but was glad, while chastising a minister who had displeased him, at the same time to satisfy his mistress's hatred.

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Frederick II's and his emissaries' sayings have led many historians to represent Louis XV as being an effeminate creature, weak and apathetic, an easy prey to intrigues and factions, at the mercy of his passions, just a puppet in the hands of ambitious men and pretty women.

Romanticism has spread the picture of a Louis XV dressed in all the vices; Sainte-Beuve, accepting this picture, was to draw a caricature of the Beloved, quite erroneous and quite unworthy of his perspicacity.

Let us listen once more to the statements made by the Prince de Cröy, an upright truthful man.

"Louis XV," he wrote in 1754, "had a very fine appearance, being the handsomest man in the Court,

and fell asleep in peace and tranquillity. This beloved daughter's death was only to increase his devotion.

De Cröy notes in his Journal: "The king remained in a terrible state; — his natural kindness and the special love for this daughter he cherished above all the rest paralyzed him. The Dauphin and Princess Adélaïde who had never left him also aroused great pity, as indeed did all the royal family, who had hastened to the king's side in a frightful state."

Anne-Henriette, the Infanta's twin sister had been the court's delight and her father's joy; she passed away in the freshness of youth and beauty, leaving a gap that could never be filled.

Scarcely had he recovered from this sorrow when Louis XV thought he was to lose the Dauphin too, who had been struck down with a violent smallpox; for interminable days he prayed heaven to cure his son, and when his prayer was granted gave countless proofs of his gratitude.

Also Mme de Pompadour was responding to his wishes in turning to a life of devotion; she thus did away with the last cause of disagreement between Louis XV and herself, and at the same time gained the good graces of Marie Leczinska and the clergy. Surrounded by rivals, fearing a fall desired by her relentless foes, and ever watching the clouds that gathered over her head, she skilfully baffled the most cunningly contrived ruses and intrigues.

The Comte d'Argenson, who loathed her, deluded

yawning with boredom and despairing of finding anything to do, modern criticism knows and appreciates his immense work, his intelligent labours, and the services he rendered to the kingdom.

On 1st October of the same year Louis XV sent the king of Spain a long missive written entirely by himself. This missive, found in the war ministry's archives, gives a clear idea of the king's knowledge, and is quite enough to destroy the legend of his weakness and lack of understanding of diplomatic requirements. So I believe, by quoting it in its entirety, I can destroy once more the biassed accounts which have for so long tarnished the memory of the Beloved.

Wishing for a rapprochement with the Court of Madrid in order to put a check to projects on foot at Vienna and London, Louis XV cleverly recalled the bonds uniting the two countries, and the community of their interests, neglecting no means of persuasion, and skilfully handling the best chosen arguments. Here is the whole text of that significant document:

"My dear brother and friend,

The tender friendship that unites us would not be such as it must be, and as my heart wishes it to be, if it did not give us confidence to share mutually our most intimate feelings, especially in the circumstances where the question of our people's happiness is concerned, or the advantages of our whole house, or the grandeur of our two monarchies. It is with this in view that I thought it

with a proud noble bearing; he conversed marvelously well on any subject, and except that he had not a high enough opinion of himself, found it difficult to make up his mind and for that reason let himself be led too easily, had all the qualities needed to make him the greatest king in the world; he had initiative, intelligence and a good memory, and was brave, active, tireless, good, and firm when the occasion demanded."

An Alfred de Vigny or a Sainte-Beuve would have been surprised at this portrait sketched by an impartial witness and so different from their own conceptions.

Temperamentally dreamy and sad, Louis XV sought the society of people who could amuse and distract him. He gave a surprising amount of his confidence to the celebrated Saint-Germain, listened to his extraordinary discourses and took real pleasure in them. He rarely addressed a word to people present, but when an interesting subject was brought up he replied wittily and with good humour, readily laughing at sallies and pleasantries. Familiarly satirical he was always attaching nicknames to people; in his letters to the Duc de Noailles he called the Duchesse de Villars "*la bonne idiote*," and laughed at her in a friendly way.

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At the beginning of 1754 he was studying worrying and difficult problems that were darkening the political horizon; if XIX<sup>th</sup> century historians represent him reclining luxuriously on a sofa,

his constancy and firmness, never shaken by the dangers that more than once assailed his crown, the English would have carried off the crowns of Spain and India for their descendants.

"It is the recollection of these important objects, so deeply impressed on the mind of the late king, Philip V your father and my uncle, that was the beginning of the friendship and deep affection he always had towards myself and towards France; and these are the same things that attach me so closely to Spain.

"I am well convinced that Your Majesty thinks the same way; and it is that mutual agreement of interests and sentiments that must ever draw closer and closer the bonds which unite our Houses, our States and our peoples. It will not rest with me alone that the noble bonds of this union last for ever, but it will be my constant object, and the fruit of the very tender friendship I shall have all my life for Your Majesty."

After reading that letter, is it possible to consider Louis XV an idle king, incapable of taking an interest in affairs of state, the toy of worthless ministers and favorites? and can we accept Michelet's and Sainte-Beuve's calumnies?

The man directing an admirably organized secret diplomacy, who backed the ideas of Noailles and Choiseul, who rejected Parliament's claims and maintained the integrity of royal absolutism amid profound changes whose consequences affected the whole of Europe — that man could be neither indolent nor pusillanimous. His letters do away

important to inform Your Majesty that I have been warned definitely and from reliable sources that the Courts of London and Vienna are flattering themselves, more than ever just now, that they are executing the plan they formed between themselves a long time ago of changing the good understanding and unity existing between Spain and France; and that these two Courts have sent new instructions to their ministers at Madrid to search for means to accomplish this object.

“I know moreover that they leave no stone unturned to spread false and malicious imputations against the views and conduct of France, and that they find no difficulty in painting me as an ambitious prince whose one object is to disturb the peace of Europe.

“It is not merely today that the Courts of Vienna and London cast jealous and angry eyes on our House’s power and splendour; the Court of Vienna will never pardon France for establishing Philip V on the throne of Spain. The Court of London wants to seize upon the treasures of the New World, and make herself the mistress of the seas. For all time the English have been constant and implacable foes to our blood and our house; we shall never have more dangerous ones. Without searching for proofs in byegone ages, what efforts have they not made to prevent Philip V, Your Majesty’s brother and my uncle, from reigning in Spain! Without the sacrifices made by our common great-grand-father, Louis XIV, — sacrifices of his treasures and the blood of his people, — without



## Chapter X

### DAMIENS' ATTACK THE PARC-AUX-CERFS AND THE LITTLE MISTRESSES (1754—1764)

ON 9<sup>th</sup> January 1757 a crowd of people belonging to the most widely diverging classes of society jostled one another in M. de Gesvres courtyard. In spite of a freezing temperature they remained for hours and hours, patiently, without complaint, their eyes glued to the great carriage entrance, waiting the arrival of a courier from Versailles. About four in the morning a huge fire helped keep off the cold; a little later their eyes were turned to the side of the street when a horseman galloped up. He had barely dismounted when he was assailed by thousands of questions and thousands of eyes implored some reply to relieve the general anguish.

Regaining breath at last the man cried out that the king was out of danger, Damiens' knife having pierced no vital organ. A shout of joy greeted his words; the crowd dispersed, happy to find its fears and alarms removed. For several days Paris had feared bad news, and huge numbers thronged Sainte-Geneviève and most of the churches. Novenas, prayers and services all implored heaven to preserve the king. Luynes found the people's anxiety as great as the heartfelt outbursts of 1744.

## CHAPTER IX

with false legends, and let us see the value of his personal achievements, grasp his objectives and the direction of his thoughts. In the same way his tenderness towards his daughters and the Dauphin entirely effaces the picture of a selfish, unfeeling and indifferent prince.

Without arrogance or affectation he kept royal dignity very high, he retained a certain sentiment of his rôle, and relinquished none of its privileges; he drew a precious consolation from religion, redeeming his manifold sins by sincere Faith which, in his eyes, remained the essential basis of the Christian life.

Damiens' attack will show once more the extent of his popularity; throughout the kingdom an outburst of loyalty affirmed the nation's attachment to its king.

Scarcely six seconds had elapsed between the moment when the assassin had done his deed and these words of the king's. Damiens offered no resistance, and let himself be arrested without attempting to escape, showing a gloomy indifference and a listless resignation.

"Put him under guard and do not kill him," the king had added; then he made his way to the castle, bleeding profusely and looking pale and anxious.

Laid on a stretcher, his wound was probed by La Martinière who declared it to be only superficial. A happy chance had spared the king's life; in fact, his thick heavy winter clothing, and his shirt, of quadruple fold where the blow had struck, had lessened its violence.

On examination, Damiens' weapon proved to be a knife with an ordinary blade on one side, and on the other a fine stiletto, sharp and flexible. Louis XV, not believing La Martinière's statements, and persuaded that he was in a very grave state, sent for a priest. Abbé de Racquecourt being at hand hastened to his bedside; then Abbé Soldini confessed him, and spent the whole night at his side, reassuring him and calming his remorse and fear. At day-break Father Desmarais conversed with the sovereign for a long time; the latter declared his wish to pardon the would-be murderer and entrusted everything to the Dauphin's care.

When his son asked him if he was suffering much he replied: "I would suffer much more if you met with such an accident."

The populace had been severely upset by Damiens' attack; every detail of the crime furnished subject for conversation; and men talked of nothing else. The precise story has been given us by the memoir-writers of the time.

After dining at Trianon, Louis XV had gone to visit Victoire who was indisposed and had stayed in her apartments at Versailles. He had ordered his coaches to be in readiness by half past five; and they awaited him at the door of the new guard room. At the prescribed hour the king came down the steps, preceded by M. de Montmirail, on his right M. de Brionne and on his left M. le Premier. In front of him were the Dauphin and M. de Baudreville, while the Duc d'Ayen kept a little to their rear.

As he came down the last step he felt himself jostled and bumped on the right side: "Someone has a sharp elbow," he exclaimed very loudly. Then the bystanders became aware of a person of about forty-five wearing a brown jacket, with his hat still on his head. Surprised at such a lack of respect the Dauphin addressed him saying: "Don't you see the King?" At the same time one of the guard threw the hat on the ground, and M. de Baudreville seized the man violently by the arm. Then, thinking he was dealing with a stupid uneducated peasant, he let it go. But Louis XV, putting his hand on the place where he had been struck, withdrew it covered with blood, and cried:

"I am wounded, and it is this man who struck me."

holding the seal in person in the Salle de l'Oeil-de-boeuf at Versailles, a little while after Machault's disgrace. Numerous pamphlets emphasized d'Argenson's dismissal; the public saw the vengeful hand of Mme de Pompadour in it, and failed to understand the well-founded reasons that had determined the king, and the causes of discontent furnished by a minister whose methods proved dangerous and often ill-omened.

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The struggle between Parliament and royal absolutism was resumed in the April of that year, and continued to have so great an importance that none could fail to take an interest in it.

Louis XV, anxious to maintain the rights of the crown in their integrity, and not to yield a particle to the magistrates, suppressed, abased and deprived of their privileges the men who claimed to be governing the kingdom and introducing important reforms. Receiving a deputation from Parliament the king pronounced a discourse where he defined very clearly his attitude, rejected all encroachment on his prerogatives, and laid down the limits in which an age-old institution must revolve. "I have been forced," he said, "to punish some individuals, for reasons which concern them alone. Do not intercede in their favour, they are no longer your colleagues. I have accepted their voluntary resignation of their offices, and have ordered that provision shall be made for the payment of their charges. Do you occupy yourselves with rendering

Marie Leczinska, the princesses and the royal family surrounded the patient, who had a high fever. Already he showed signs of a return to religion, renewing the hopes raised at Metz and awakening the most lively fears in Mme de Pompadour's heart. For several days she did not see the king, and waited for an order of exile from the priests and the devout, and she foresaw the triumph of her enemies who congratulated themselves on the nearness of her fall. Was a change to transform the Court? Many courtiers proclaimed it, and predicted a new turn in the king's life, an era of piety and moral purity. On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January Louis XV went out for the first time, breathed the fresh air in the park, admired the leafless trees and the tranquil waters, and forgot his resolutions just as he had at Metz. Mme de Pompadour regained her influence and authority; the storm forecast dissipated itself, and a new Fool's Day amused historians and writers.

At the end of March Damiens expiated his fault by torture so horrible that it cannot be described; courage fails me at the thought of relating the episodes of that horribly barbarous execution. Two ministers paid the price of their hostility towards the marquise; Machault d'Arnauville, who above all had avoided her for fear of compromising himself, resigned his office and went back to his own house where he lived far from the business world; d'Argenson received a harsh and peremptory order of exile.

One of Pasquier's engravings shows Louis XV

work on. The despotism of sensual passions weighed on Louis XV's memory and formed its character.

Turning to forbidden pleasures after a marriage consummated at the age of fifteen, tired of a wife worn out with bearing so many children and incapable of satisfying his imperious physical demands, the king let himself be led away by practised guides. Richelieu and Bachelier opened to him the road to an immoral life; these heralds of vice had initiated him, not without having to overcome a certain timidity, even repulsion, on his part, that came from the teachings of Mme de Ventadour and Cardinal Fleury. In his career along the easy pleasant path of pleasure, Louis XV had been given as acknowledged mistresses the Nesle sisters; intelligent, ambitious and by no means reluctant, they had spared nothing to satisfy their thirst for honours and rewards, and to associate in their personal triumph a jealous, greedy and imperious class.

Stormy loves amid universal curiosity, tragic loves when death came once and again to destroy them, loves unsatisfied, mingled with remorse and repentance.

The king certainly cherished Mme de Mailly and the proud Duchesse de Châteauroux; he mourned them; but what impression did they leave on his fickle inconstant heart? Very little; oblivion soon wiped their memory from his mind; they had been only a pleasant episode in his love life, nothing more.

justice to my subjects, and have no doubts that I give tokens of my generosity to those who hasten to show their zeal and their obedience.”

Louis XV rejected Parliament's remonstrances, maintained his decisions, spoke loudly and firmly before the magistrates who were eager to establish themselves in an equality with royal power. Unlike his grandson and successor, he grasped at once the drift of social and economic questions, measuring their consequences, and foreseeing the repercussions and their good or evil consequences; and he never let himself be taken in by fine words; the most passionate eloquence found him cold and impassive.

Far from resigning the noble and majestic air that he never abandoned in any situation, he listened attentively, retained marvellously, and then replied with courtesy, authority and intelligence; no abruptness, impatience or sign of ill-humour; he excelled in self-control and in disguising his first impressions; when he had decided a problem he never went back on his decision.

Sometimes however he accepted the advice of ministers and councillors whose sagacity and devotion were known to him; Bernis and Choiseul for instance; still, his attitude was leagues removed from the passive submission of a Louis XVI to Calonne and Necker.

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A troubled atmosphere momentarily enveloped the life of the Beloved; and amid the bad odour of the last years scandal found plenty of material to



her eyes on the institution of the notorious Parcaux-Cerfs.

As he grew older Louis XV aspired to less and less noble pleasures; he wanted young, innocent, artless girls who could provide him with sensations new to his cloyed senses. The titled ladies of the court bored and rather frightened him; he wanted to yield himself to his sensual pleasures in comparative mystery, protected from enquiring eyes, well away from the Dauphin, or priests and worthy men whom his conduct roused to indignation; in a word, he wanted to hide from the judgments of household and subjects.

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“On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1753,” writes the Duc de Cröy, “two great topics caused anxiety in Court and city.” One was Parliament’s catastrophe — it had just been exiled to Pontoise; the second concerned a pretty girl who had been the king’s mistress for two months. She, so they said, was rising to favour at the expense of Mme de Pompadour, who was well aware of it, and consequently rather disturbed.

The pretty girl in question was called Louise O’Murphy; her youth — she was only fifteen — and her dazzling beauty were bewitching and set the most serious dreaming. A lovely complexion, softly rounded curves, laughing eyes, saucy mouth, merry, lively ways, and a grace that pervaded her person, all gave this delightful creature an irresist-

When Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, in all the radiance of her youthful beauty and with all the seduction of her charms, offered herself to him and brought to his disillusionment a renewal of youth, kindling the dying spark, a flame shot up that lit with dazzling brilliance the years 1745—1750. She not only satisfied his voluptuous nature but she filled the gap that so unhappily marked the sovereign's private life.

At once mistress, friend and counsellor, understanding all the delicacy of a sensitive mind, skilled at distracting him and piercing the mystery of his thoughts, she guessed also his cares and anxieties. Mme de Pompadour kept off rivals jealous of her popularity; the Comtesse de Choiseul and the Comtesse d'Estrades failed in their clumsy attempts, and Louis XV saw them go without sorrow or regret.

Then came the attack of illness, and the shadows of death gathered round the head of the marquise who coughed blood, was tortured by inability to breathe, grew thin and had to resign her rôle as mistress. A renunciation which would have announced an inevitable fall but for the superiority of an intelligence now indispensable to the king. Desirous of maintaining an influence whose source and original immoral character no longer existed, Mme de Pompadour searched for a means of satisfying her lover's physical desires; and turning him from the Versailles beauties, ladies of high rank who might have taken her place, offered him more lowly girls and closed

Five years later M. d'Ayat, a noble from Auvergne, aide-major in the Beauvoisis regiment, married Louise O'Murphy; and after his death she married M. Le Normand, tallage collector at Riom. This little mistress, uneducated and tactless, never disturbed the marquise. Louis XV, having taken advantage of her youth and enjoyed her savour, cast her off without regret.

In Mme de Pompadour's eyes, far more serious were the intrigues of the Marquise de Coislins. Bewitchingly pretty she aspired to the place of favorite and to benefiting from the advantages attached thereto. According to Duclos she gave herself to the king like a girl and was left in the same way. Many of the familiars of Versailles had hoped to see her rise to power; the king called her "proud Vashti," delighted in her company and showered favours on her. Making the mistake of revealing her insatiable greed, and wearying the king by constant demands, always asking for huge sums, she paid the price of her cupidity and her lack of discernment.

As the years passed the king desired nothing more, outside the Parc-aux-Cerfs, finding there resigned, discreet submissive victims who were easy to cast off when he wished.

The imagination of pamphleteer and novelist was to take an extraordinary delight in lurid accounts of this pleasure haunt. Under their pens the modest house in Rue Saint-Médéric at Versailles, standing in the huge Parc-aux-Cerfs district so much frequented by Louis XV incognito, took on

ible charm; Louis XV fell for it with unusual violence.

After posing as odalisques and nymphs for François Boucher she had been shown to the king by Lebel. Surprised by her apparent innocence and her feigned modesty, Louis immediately fell violently in love with her; he wanted her to come to live at Versailles, then he set her up in a little house in the Parc-aux-Cerfs, with a housekeeper, a maid and two lackeys. The mystery enveloping the episodes of this mad love is apparently hard to fathom.

Entirely dominated by a being whose physical attraction overwhelmed him, Louis XV could not resist her; for years she had him in absolute slavery to her. But historians eager for scandalous tales are entirely in the dark as to stories of the king and Louise O'Murphy. Certainly very often contemporaries, such as Casanova, Meusnier, d'Argenson and Barbier, give as evidence what amounts only to a mass of false legends and story-tales. Still such was the credit of Boucher's one-time model that very little prevented the cobbler's daughter from becoming mistress in name and replacing Mme de Pompadour.

In May 1753 everyone was waiting for the open acknowledgement of an extraordinary favour; everyone hazarded a guess at the monarch's projects. Projects which were never realized; time brought satiety; even she became indifferent; and other beauties caught Louis XV's eye.

1725 to 1764, and setting a stigma on man and monarch. The truth is quite the reverse; it puts in their place wantonly exaggerated inventions, and throws a light on an interesting period of Louis XV's life, without providing an excuse for intolerable and degrading practices.

A great relaxation of morals had given rich nobles, opulent financiers, and well-to-do bourgeois, a liberty whose limits can be judged from prints and pictures of the times. If the practice of religion continued among the mass of French society, certain higher classes were content with an acceptance of the outer forms; and casting off obligations and restraints, gave free reign to the pleasures and passions that worked in them.

Men like Richelieu and the majority of philosophers broke clean away from the protection of the Church, and, free of the limitations it imposed, wallowed in a mire of vice with monstrous frenzy. Licentious tracts never attained such crudity or such vigour of expression; never except during the Renaissance had the models described by Suetonius found so many imitators.

Farmer-generals, tax-collectors, bankers and merchants had houses where they kept low-class girls and gave themselves up to secret debaucheries without the least danger to their reputation or esteem. The police were unaware or compliant; lawfully-wedded wives often accepted a state of affairs in regular practice. Painters and artists worked in these temples of love, vying in wit and in the creation of charming and voluptuous pieces.

the importance of a house of fame worthy of the morals of the Bas-Empire.

The modest dimensions of this dwelling, which was only one storey high, changed to the vast apartments of a perverted luxury where everything incited the monarch to voluptuousness and forgetfulness of his duty. Had he been a real sultan of some oriental tale, Louis XV would have kept a harem full of seductive beauties, torn by force from their families and offered to his pleasures by treacherous accomplices. Certain memoir-writers claim to have heard screams and cries from his victims, prisoners isolated from the world; they recount tales of abductions by night at the king's orders, and were not sparing of smutty details likely to rouse curiosity, indignation and disgust. Clever artists depicted the Beloved, surrounded by naked women in lascivious poses, in an atmosphere of vice and corruption.

Rumours that the Parc-aux-Cerfs had been transformed, embellished and arranged for definite ends gave a lead to revolutionary writers who set up the virtue of new men, French spartans, in contrast to the king's debaucheries.

Later this tradition established itself, and new stories were added; Michelet, Sainte-Beuve and romantic historians were eager to accept them without criticism.

The Parc-aux-Cerfs dominated Louis XV's reign, casting to oblivion the king's political, social, economic and religious services, wiping out the memory of all he had done for the kingdom from

Louis caught innocent birds to satisfy the demands of his passions must remain a blot on his life. The *Oeil-de-Boeuf* chronicle mentions the forceful abduction from her home of a girl of eleven, and the cruelty and cunning of the performance; she must have been dragged to the Parc-aux-Cerfs while her father, a rich Nantes merchant, moved heaven and earth to get her out, appealing to Parliament, the head of police, and the Châtelet authorities, and then returned to his province in despair. There is nothing to prove the authenticity of this story which has spread with a wealth of revolting details, and doubtless was the fabrication of slanderers who knew nothing about Louis XV's love affairs.

Mme de Hausset, Mme de Pompadour's waiting-woman, sets down in her diary a no less scandalous and just as truthful a story.

Among the inhabitants of the Parc-aux-Cerfs was a pretty blonde girl of sixteen; having taken the king's fancy she visited him for three weeks and bestowed on him every mark of sincere passion. The innocent let herself be caught; and when she saw that her lover was definitely cooling towards her she endured violent grief. One day, delving in Louis XV's pockets she found a letter from Broglie and another from the king of Spain; thus the Polish noble's identity was revealed, but she did not want anyone to suspect her discovery. At the time of Damiens' attack, however, she could not disguise her anguish; and when Mme Bertrand asked her what caused her floods of tears, she

These pleasure houses were not very numerous, for they cost a considerable amount and required meticulous surveillance; the greater part of them were round about Paris. So it was a custom detestable but now quite frequent to which Louis XV conformed; he had put the house of the Parc-aux-Cerfs in the hands of Mme Bertrand, a discreet and reliable middle-aged woman; the inmates called her "the Mother Superior;" she had as her assistant Lebel, the king's valet-de-chambre, a kind of cunning Mercury.

In this strange dwelling there were never more than three girls; and they lived in buildings that adjoined one another. Each had a housekeeper, a lackey, a cook and a chamber-maid. Two thousand francs sufficed to support these young women, living away from the world, and never coming out except to attend comedy, where a curtained box was reserved for them.

To dissipate what could have been deadly boredom, music, singing and literature teachers came to instruct and amuse them. They did not associate with one another and knew nothing of outside events; Louis XV, of whose rank they had no suspicion, was to them a Polish noble, and a generous handsome and kind lover.

It would be useless to endeavour to justify such behaviour; if its importance is reduced to its just proportions today, it is none the less unworthy of a man whom we have shown to have intelligence and so many good qualities. This snare in which



which was set off still more by magnificent black hair. Her features were of a perfect regularity; her complexion was delicately coloured, her great black eyes were at once lively and brilliant, and very sweet; she had finely-arched brows, a tiny mouth, regular teeth, and lips of a tender rose on which rested a smile of charm and modesty."

Louis XV fell a victim to such a combination of charms; she gave him a son on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1762, having made herself queen of his heart and his senses. Mlle Romans never resided at the Parc-aux-Cerfs; she set herself up in a fine house at Passy, and often visited Versailles. Under the influence of a real passion the king had dreams of legitimizing this child of a woman he loved; he showered presents on the young mother, sent her ardent letters, and enquired solicitously after her health. Mlle Romans displayed neither finesse nor prudence in her behaviour, showed her son as "the king's child," proclaimed his paternity, and let herself drift into ambitious dreams. On becoming Baroness de Meilly-Coulongé, she had ideas of taking Mme de Pompadour's place.

But they were vain fantasies; already Louis XV was chasing other pleasures and turning from her; already she was ceasing to find favour in his eyes. A search of her house had destroyed the proofs of her relations with the king. Banished from Versailles she married Marquis de Cavanac; her son, the Abbé de Bourbon, died at Naples on February 1787; she herself died in poverty and unhappiness in 1808. Mlle Romans' history is like

replied: "There is no consolation for the loss of the king of France."

Scarcely had he recovered when Louis XV returned to the Parc-aux-Cerfs; seeing him go into a rival's room, she followed and flung herself at his feet, exclaiming: "Yes, you are king of all your kingdom, but that would be nothing to me if you were not king of my heart; do not forsake me, dear Sire! I thought I would go mad when you were nearly killed."

The list of visitors in the Parc-aux-Cerfs is, anyhow, very short; apart from Louise O'Murphy I can mention: Mlles Saint-André, David, Fouquet, Hénaut, Robert, Marie-Louise de Marny, Marie-Pie Gramboni, Armory and Selin. Between 1753 and 1765 there were certainly other retiring persons who left no traces and whose names have remained buried in complete oblivion. But we are still leagues removed from the legions of captives so complacently enumerated by chronicles.

In general they received a dowry and were married to impoverished nobles; despite Comte Fleury's researches we know almost nothing about them; the fantastical legends taken up by Mme Campan and Soulevie deserve no attention and are nothing but pure tales.

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In 1759 Anne Couppier was introduced to the king under the name of Mlle Romans.

Casanova writes in glowing praise of this girl's beauty: "Her satiny skin was of a dazzling white,

hastening towards the grave; under paints and powders she hid a deathly pallor; still mistress of a worn-out body she imposed a terrible restraint on her anguish and alarms. On 29<sup>th</sup> February 1764, she was laid low by a putrid fever, after tragic struggles between a clear and lucid mind and a declining body. Louis XV, anxious and bewildered by this new blow of fate, showed genuine sollicitude, went down to see the Marquise every day, talked long with her and distracted her; and questioned the doctors. After various vicissitudes the malady took a turn for the worse on 7<sup>th</sup> April; six days were spent in anxious waiting; then the news of her death spread throughout the kingdom, rousing deep emotion.

The funeral was at Notre-Dame de Versailles; then the cortège made its way towards the Eglise des Capucins in Paris, where the body was to lie. Leaning on the high window of his study, Louis XV sadly contemplated the last journey of her whom he had loved so well, — the only woman who had fully given him the most precious and the rarest treasures. Two tears escaped from his eyes and he said to Charost: "Those are the only things I can offer her!"

To his son-in-law, the Infante of Spain, he wrote: "My previous letter will have explained why I did not answer your letters today. My anxieties have all been removed in the saddest way, as you will surely understand!..."

The Marquise's death deprived him of a moral support, and the permanent comfort of a most

that of Mlle Tiercelin, who succeeded her in the royal favour. Aged sixteen in 1762, she amused Louis XV with her roguish lively grace. On 7<sup>th</sup> February 1764 a son was born; he became later Abbé Le Duc, benefited from Bernis and Louis XV's protection, and died an octogenarian.

Choiseul and the Marquise de Pompadour, fearing the growing influence of an intelligent and ambitious mistress, tried to destroy her prestige. In 1766 she was driven from Court, and put in a convent, from which she emerged to abandon herself to scandalous adventures that diverted Parisian chronicles.

Vanishing pictures, apparitions shrouded in a fine mist, frail beauties scarcely in flower, the girls given up to the king from 1753 to 1765 are surrounded with pathos. Several believed in the sincerity of a real love, and became devoted to the handsome noble who showered gifts upon them; and later they wept his ingratitude and inconstancy.

Certain of them wanted to acquire honours; and, at the very moment when their ambitions seemed on the point of being realized, they were dashed to earth.

Louis XV who had a fear of sorrow helped create it in innocent hearts; Posterity cannot pardon him for that.

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At the pinnacle of her desires, and in enjoyment of an envied position, Mme de Pompadour was

mont and Mme d'Esparbès de Lussan; the marquise called them her kittens, was on familiar terms with them, and took pleasure in their company.

Count Fleury asserts that in private she called them "my dish-cloth" and "my slut"; sure of their good faith she often brought them into the king's presence; it was a real good faith on the part of the Comtesse d'Amblimont — but only apparent faith as far as Mme d'Esparbès was concerned. He seems, indeed, to recognize her acquaintance with the king from 1764; whether she was long Louis' mistress we do not know, for memoir-writers give contradictory accounts, and we have no means of verifying their affirmations.

But after that she had many rivals whom she cleverly out-witted, establishing her influence with diplomacy and finesse that disconcerted her enemies. Among their number the Duc de Choiseul was the bitterest; he had hoped for his own sister's ascendancy, Beatrix Comtesse de Gramont; his projects foiled, he retained violent hatred towards Mme d'Esparbès and neglected no opportunity of mortifying or injuring her.

With the aid of malicious accomplices, he invented some obscure story which made her suspect to the king, and obtained an order for her exile, congratulating himself on removing the danger which threatened him. Mme d'Esparbès, endowed with both bodily and mental graces, had entertained ambitious designs, and had aspired to the title of duchess, to the right of sitting before the king, and all the favours that Mme de Pompa-

needed help. For twenty years he had poured out to her the pains and cares that weighed upon him; no woman could replace that understanding, wise friend, so good at heart beneath her light frivolous exterior. Her passing left a gap never to be filled; Mme du Barry never succeeded in that, and the king's life never regained its equilibrium and its peace.

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Scarcely had the favorite drawn her last breath when a new network of intrigues was woven, and ambitions woke once more; Versailles was in a state of expectation.

Louis was fifty-four and preserved a noble, majestic bearing; physical exercise and the practice of energetic sports gave him an extraordinarily youthful appearance; his features kept their perfect regularity, though one could discern the traces of fatigue and passion. In 1763 Louis Michel Van Loo made a resplendent portrait of him, and it is today in the Versailles museum; this portrait sets before us a faithful picture of the Beloved. His attitude is majestic and lordly without being overbearing; and one can see in it a wish to impose respect.

Soon the Court and the town's most engrossing past-time was guessing the name of the next royal mistress; no-one could conceive of Louis XV without a favorite. Among Mme de Pompadour's friends and confidantes, two women had enjoyed an exceptional popularity; the Comtesse d'Ambli-

## Chapter XI

# THE SUBVERSION OF ALLIANCES AND THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR. GREAT ECO- NOMIC, FINANCIAL, MILITARY AND SO- CIAL REFORMS. LOUIS XV'S PERSONAL PART

(1750—1774)

**T**He Subversion of Alliances and the Seven Years' War were dominating elements in French politics between 1750 and 1760; men's minds received a new orientation towards highly complex problems; the abandonment of traditions roused a dangerous hostility between a king who was an innovator and a nation attached to the principles of the past. A hostility whose consequences became clear at the end of the monarchy, and with the achievement of the fall of the throne set Marie Antoinette on the path to the scaffold.

By the Versailles treaty Louis XV roused public opinion against him, and also the literary and philosophical world, and all those who admired Russia and hated Austria. In rejecting his grandfather's theories he was digging a ditch that was difficult to cross.

Not only was the justice of his views to remain unacknowledged, but they met with almost unanimous disapproval. The French of the time regarded Frederick II with respect, admiring his

dour had enjoyed. Well-educated, a writer of light and witty verse, loving art and literature, her gay intelligent conversation much pleased Louis XV. Numerous foes of Choiseul's had worked on her to obtain the dismissal of a detested minister; she was far too willing to meddle in politics and did not know how to hold her tongue in surroundings where the least remark was exaggerated, distorted and repeated with malicious intent.

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In 1764 the future held ten years for Louis XV, ten years singularly fruitful in all sorts of events, ten important years full of sorrows and losses. Grief still kept close to Louis XV's side; he saw his wife, his son, his daughter-in-law, his best counsellors and friends all die; he saw his kingdom encompassed with the most terrible difficulties; he understood the full extent of his unpopularity, and died leaving his power to inexperienced hands. Mme du Barry and the Parc-aux-Cerfs gave him some scarcely noble pleasures; after each excess a wave of bitterness swept over him; remorse and the fear of hell poisoned his orgies; the teachings of the Church harassed his soul without his being able to practise them with confidence or happiness.

However, those same last years had their beauty; useful and beneficial reforms allied themselves to a keen understanding of future necessities and a rare foresight of the inevitable changes that both society and the State must undergo.



come to her without arousing any attention or curiosity.

Scarcely had he come before her when the marquise, whose confidant and friend he was, gave him a letter from Starhemberg, Austria's plenipotentiary minister to Versailles. The Viennese diplomat requested an interview, wishing to take part in the secret negotiations with the Empress Marie-Thérèse; he asked that Louis XV should appoint a minister of his own to be present at the interview, and to give the king a full account and bring back his reply.

Mme de Pompadour, who had had close dealings with Marie-Thérèse's envoys for some time, was anxious for an alliance between the two nations and spared nothing to further the possibilities. Comte Wenceslas de Kaunitz, appointed ambassador to France in 1753, had served the royal mistress in the slow tedious elaboration of her projects of alliance — projects secretly approved by Louis XV, but till 1755 buried in the darkest mystery. Being brusquely informed of the position of the negotiations, and invited by Mme de Pompadour to participate in them as the king's representative, Bernis was alarmed and anxious, and also reluctant.

He represented both forcefully and convincingly that, in changing the political system of Europe, they would be risking a war with Frederick II, that the union of two great Catholic countries would alarm Protestant nations, that an alliance with Austria would not be popular with the

literary and artistic tastes, his religious tolerance, his valour, his daring and his firmness.

On the other hand the Court of Vienna was their ancestral enemy; for three hundred years she had not ceased to wage war against the fleur-de-llys, and she entertained ambitions incompatible with the peace of Europe.

Frederick II's treachery and betrayals failed to throw light on a mass blindness; everyone had some excuse for the treasonable failures of the king celebrated by Voltaire and Belle-Isle, for his disregard of treaties, pacts and the most sacred pledges, for his greed for conquest and for plunder.

Under cover of raising the social standard, the master of Prussia inaugurated despotic, brutal, bloody and barbarous customs; he brought in an era of plunder and rapine, followed nothing but his own interests, and recognized no nobility of sentiment, no frankness, no faith in the given word.

Louis XV hated this perverted man, and wished to renounce an imaginary support whose future dangers he clearly discerned.

Deprived of the greater part of her forces Austria no longer threatened French interests; and, fearing Frederick II's machinations, she was desirous of a rapprochement with Versailles, offering guarantees and advantages.

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In August 1755, when he was going off to rejoin his embassy at Madrid, Abbé Bernis received a letter from Mme de Pompadour, begging him to

mystery. In September 1755 an interview at the Babirole castle saw a meeting between the Austrian diplomat, Abbé Bernis and the marquise.

By the mouth of her envoy Marie-Thérèse denounced the Prussian king's intentions, revealed the near prospects of her alliance with England, and showed the peril of a new coalition, and the community of French and Austrian interests.

The empress's frank confident attitude was absolutely unequivocal; she threw a clear light on the position, informed the Court of Versailles on certain facts they had not yet appreciated, and offered an alliance, supporting this offer with a display of undoubted advantages. The foundations were laid for a treaty that must be accepted by the allies of the two powers; and the king of France gave a favorable reply to the overtures from Vienna.

The importance of such decisions obliged Bernis to inform a few ministers; he chose Saint-Florentin, Machault, Rouillé, and de Séchelles, leaving d'Argenson in ignorance.

With neither reproof nor encouragement he struggled against a latent opposition, and despaired of the general lack of understanding — one in which he himself had shared, but the dangers and perils of which did not escape him.

On 1st January 1756 an Anglo-Prussian entente was signed at Westminster; on 1st of the following May the Treaty of Versailles united France and Austria. This treaty, methodically prepared along the lines set down by Kaunitz and Marie-Thérèse,

people of France, and that neither army nor treasury could stand any great upheaval.

While he was speaking Louis XV entered and asked him what he thought of Starhemberg's letter; the abbé revealed his pessimistic views and put forward the causes of his fears and hesitation, backing up his arguments with sound reasoning. But the king impatiently interrupted him with: "I see that you, like the others, are hostile to the Hungarian queen!"

Bernis spoke up and tried to convince the king; after a few minutes Louis exclaimed: "Oh well, we'll have to send a word of approval to Starhemberg, but tell him that we won't listen to him."

"That is not my sentiment, Sire," the abbé replied, "Your Majesty has every interest in informing himself on the intentions of the Viennese Court; but one must be careful what answer is given."

Louis XV had wanted an agreement with Austria for a long time; and he felt a keen sympathy with Marie-Thérèse who roused his admiration by her heroism, intelligence, strength of purpose, and her family virtues. He could not be unaware of the people's hostility to such projects; and he found the same hostility in his councils, where Machault and Séchelles were loud in their hatred of the empire. So for six months there had been secret parleys; the Prince de Conti, Mme de Pompadour, Bernis, Choiseul, Starhemberg and Kaunitz were the only people in the secret; and no indiscretion troubled what must necessarily be a

and Marshal Daun, Frederick II thought the issue too much compromised; he tried to negotiate, already imploring moderate terms from his adversaries, and brought forward proposals for peace which were transmitted to Louis XV by roundabout secret ways.

But Louis, in possession of Hanover, in occupation of part of Germany, bound by common interests to the Court of Vienna, and having hopes of getting the better of Prussia's pride and covetousness, refused offers he deemed inadequate and unacceptable. Certainly he had no means of guessing the deadly events of the near future; and there was nothing to make him suspect dramatic consequences. The day of 5<sup>th</sup> November 1757 was to turn a brilliantly successful campaign to disaster, rouse public opinion, bring about a violent reaction against Louis XV's generals and ministers, and carry to fever-heat hatred for Austria and for Mme de Pompadour.

Early one memorable afternoon Frederick had no thoughts of battle; his chances of success seemed weak; and sunk in dejection and despondency, he began to lose faith in his star. The French army under Soubise, thirty thousand strong, was far from thinking of a coming battle; for three days they had received no provisions, and they were feeling the fatigue of their long marches.

The imperial troops under the Prince de Saxe-Hildburghausen seemed demoralized and worn out. So, informed of their condition, the Prussian general Seydlitz made a sharp and sudden attack

elaborated without the interference of public opinion and welcomed by Louis XV and Marie-Thérèse as the only means of replying to the ambitious drift of London's and Berlin's plans, this Versailles treaty certainly cleared the political horizon.

Scarcely had it been ratified when Frederick II suddenly invaded Saxony on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1756, forced the Austrian troops to capitulate, and began to threaten Austria. Emboldened by his easy success he entered Bohemia, triumphed at Prague, suffered a bloody defeat before Kolin and had to abandon the upper part of the Elbe valley.

Marie-Thérèse having demanded the restoration of twenty-four thousand men, promised in the Versailles treaty, Bernis advised sending her German troops in the French service, and only two regiments from the royal armies; d'Argenson and Louis XV contested this advice and finally succeeded in having several French divisions sent. These made their way into Germany; one went up the Main; the other under Marshal d'Estrées, inflicted a terrible defeat on the Duke of Cumberland at Hastenbeck.

The Closter-Seven convention put the English army and the German soldiers in its service out of action; but it was rendered useless by England who did not respect its clauses.

However, on 6<sup>th</sup> September, after the Russian victory at Jagersdorf, numerous French and Austrian successes, and advantages gained by Richelieu

these reverses were compensated by Ferdinand of Brunswick's victories at the head of the Anglo-Hanoverian troops at Crefeld and Minden.

In 1759 the Austrians seized Frankfurt-on-the-Oder; the Russians entered Berlin in October 1760. For want of good generals, of a single command, and the military skill of a Hermann-Maurice de Saxe, or a Villars, the French armies under de Broglie and Soubise suffered a humiliating defeat at Willinghausen in July 1761.

To meet the perils of a costly war which was telling heavily on the treasury and always unpopular, the Duc de Choiseul, minister of foreign affairs in Bernis' place, negotiated with London without appreciable results. He was more successful in concluding the famous *Pacte de famille* which associated the various branches of the Bourbon family with French politics.

Louis XV always approved and supported his minister's views; he wanted peace — an honorable peace which would allow a setting in order of finances and reparation for immense losses.

An unforeseen event occurred still more to modify the last phase of the Seven Years' War; at the time when Frederick II saw the Russians invading Pomerania and was defending Saxony and Silesia against resolute foes, when he saw his treasury empty and his army exhausted, the Tsarine Elisabeth died on 5th January 1762, leaving the power to Peter III, who immediately offered his alliance to the king of Prussia.

This brutal change could have had disastrous

and took advantage of their disorder, lack of cohesion and their astonishment. In face of Seydlitz' cold determination, Soubise and Hildburghausen could not co-operate and had to act alone.

The sun set on the Rosbach disaster; Frederick II had lost one hundred and sixty-five men, and he celebrated an easy victory with decisive results, while Paris learned with anger and indignation of the French and Austrian retreat.

A month later Marie-Thérèse's soldiers were defeated by the king of Prussia at Lissa.

Louis XV's days were sad and gloomy at this time; his unpopularity grew with our army's reverses; and the alliance with Austria was denounced as the source of all evils that were afflicting the kingdom.

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From 1758 to 1760 the second period of the Seven Year's War showed almost equal gains and losses. Prussia's enemies made a successful beginning, and invading the southern parts of the country, occupied Brandenburg; for a while the Russian forces threatened Frederick II seriously and caused him grave anxiety. After the battle at Mondorf they were driven eastwards, while the Austrians saw themselves forced back into Bohemia and the French towards the Rhine.

Still the Prussian king sustained severe defeats at Hochkirch, Kunersdorf and Maxen; frequent reverses scattered and weakened his army; but



to keep them, was ready to make sacrifices that France would not have consented to. On the other hand the Anglo-Saxons in America were more divided than the French. These states, peopled with dissenters, difficult characters and subjects with no feeling of loyalty, were jealous of one another, and seemed scarcely capable of uniting for co-operative action; while the French colonies, well administered by faithful soldiers of the king, could form and carry out great schemes."

In fact French colonists' heroism, valour and unselfishness promised every hope. There was a select body to govern the royal possessions; and an admirable understanding of the native races did away with clashes and friction; and a firmly exercised humaneness rallied many different peoples round the fleur-de-lys.

Unfortunately the work accomplished in Canada and India by men deserving of the greatest praise was of little interest to the nation. They lacked a colonizing spirit, that spirit that could rouse all William Pitt's England to the defence of distant lands; that spirit possessed by the London worker as well as by sailor, soldier, magistrate and lord of the admiralty.

In France people rarely looked at maps; they did not know the moral and economic value of the regions where spices and rare things came from. The events of their daily life, echoes from Court and city, works of art and literature claimed their attention and were enough to occupy the minds of nobility and commons.

repercussions if, from both sides, a great weariness of war had not hastened the end of hostilities.

The Treaty of Hubertsburg terminated the Seven Years' War in 1763; it had been a costly war without any practical result, begun under the happiest omens and ended in discouragement and weariness.

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Though a pacifist, Louis XV was drawn into ceaseless European conflicts, and had to fight not only on the continent but also on sea and in the colonies.

In anticipation of a resumption of hostilities in Canada, India and the Mediterranean, Machault and Rouillé from 1749 had ordered a reorganization of the French navy; they had established storehouses and munition supplies at Brest, Rochefort and Toulon, had begun numbers of ships in the yards and formed well-armed squadrons.

England, alarmed at these preparations, increased the strength of her fleet and gave the command to Admirals Boscawen, Hawke and Byng.

André Maurois writes in his remarkable *Histoire d'Angleterre*: "The position of the French in Canada was far from safe. The English colonies had, since Charles II who had acquired the Carolinas and the state of New-York, formed a homogeneous, well populated block along the coast. They had about 1,200,000 inhabitants, while the number of French colonists in Canada scarcely exceeded 60,000. England, a country where merchants were powerful, clung passionately to her colonies, and, in order

was now fully appreciated; and Choiseul spared nothing to endow the kingdom with one. In 1757 the island of Aix was taken by the English; in 1758 they blockaded our ships off Toulon and did not succeed in landing at Saint-Cast.

The proposal of a descent on Great Britain, approved by Louis XV, cast London into a state of panic; William Pitt painted the horrors of such an invasion, and the people were roused to indignation, as they were to be later in similar circumstances. But the French fleet, cut in two by the English, was forced to abandon that attempt. At Cape St. Vincent the Mediterranean squadron suffered total disaster, while Conflans' ships incurred heavy losses in the estuary of the Vilaine. The blockade of the French ports had been successful, and our fleet's inferiority had been increased by numerous engagements where twenty-nine ships of the line and thirty-five frigates had been lost, despite their commandants' heroism and ability.

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In India, Robert Clive was extending the English possessions, and by the victory of Plassy made his country master of Bengal. After Dupleix' departure Bussy de Decan had wisely administered our possessions. Appointed governor in 1756, Lally-Tollendal drove the English from the Coromandel coast, and found himself besieged in Pondichéry. For several months with seven hundred soldiers he resisted an army of twenty-two thousand men and a fleet of fourteen vessels of the line.

On the other hand no minister but Choiseul could be compared with Pitt. After Walpole's and Pelham's conciliatory attitude, Pitt coming into power established a warlike intransigent policy; he preached English supremacy on the Continent and in the colonies, he preached hatred of the house of Bourbon, and he roused his country against France with a harshness, violence and passion hitherto unknown.

A strong-willed overbearing statesman, he worked out vast projects, and united countless forces for the service of a triumphant imperialism.

At the same time Louis XV and his advisers were suffering from a painful lack of money, which was paralyzing their schemes; Parliament kept up a surly but persistent opposition; taxes came in laboriously; and operations on the continent absorbed the greater part of their financial resources.

Moreover the war was unpopular; at Paris and Versailles defeatists and pamphlet-writers spread themselves in bitter criticism, harsh accusations and scandalous stories about generals and ministers; a dangerous state of mind made room for most mischievous undercurrents.

Before the declaration of war three hundred French merchant vessels had been captured by Admiral Boscawen in November 1755. This humiliation was wiped out by Galissonière's brilliant victory off Minorca, where Byng's fleet had a bloody defeat.

From 1757 to 1759 the French coasts were seriously threatened; the value of a powerful navy

obvious inferiority, demands money and reinforcements, and throws the light of convincing arguments on a difficult situation.

But Montcalm and his officers' intrepidity made up for the lack; the English were held in check and could not realize their desires. Still Belle-Isle, on becoming war minister, shamefully abandoned the heroic defenders of Canada, asking them to hold out to the end with almost no forces. Montcalm replied: "I dare to assure you of my full resolution to save this poor colony, or to die." On 13<sup>th</sup> September 1759 he fell before Quebec, mortally wounded; the town was taken by the English, who occupied Montreal in September 1760.

Henceforth New France escaped the rule of the fleur-de-lys and fell under English domination, after a glorious tragic career.

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Louis XV sadly accepted the Treaty of Paris; it ended eight years of barren and exhausting struggles, increased the nation's complaints and gave free utterance to bitter reproofs.

Saint-Vincent, Dominique, Tobago, Canada from the Ohio to the left bank of the Mississippi, fell into the hands of the English. Of all her conquests in North America France retained only the tiny islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and the fishing rights off Newfoundland.

In Africa she gave up Saint-Louis in Senegal; in India she kept only the five trade centres in

Without provisions, money or resources, he had finally to surrender after acts of heroism worthy of ancient times. He was accused by powerful enemies of having betrayed the king's interests, and was thrown into the Bastille. A monstrously wicked process condemned him without proof; the High Court of Paris ordered the death penalty; and he suffered it on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1766 in spite of Voltaire's eloquent and pathetic pleading on his behalf.

Lally-Tollendal, like Mahé de la Bourdonnais, is an example of human injustice, an example which shows how badly France rewarded her best sons and how courage and worth were paid with ingratitude in every age. The capitulations of Pondichéry and Mahé soon completed the ruin of the king's Indian colonies.

In Canada the Marquis de Montcalm, commandant of the French forces, signalized himself in 1756 by glorious victories; he took the English forts on Lake Ontario, put to flight an enemy army near Lake Champlain, and was triumphant two years after at Fort Carillon. His rivals in talent and bravery were de Levis, Colonel de Bourlamaque and Captain Bougainville.

Louis XV had granted Montcalm five thousand soldiers, the total number of Frenchmen in the service in America rose to sixteen thousand, a laughable figure when one thinks of the size of the country and the English forces that threatened it. In his letters to the Comte d'Argenson, M. de Vaudreuil, governor of Canada, complains of that

themselves out in uneven conflicts. While William Pitt obtained millions to continue the war, Louis XV saw himself weighing the necessity and the utility of every scheme.

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The financial problem was developing parallel with the Seven Years' War; and it was a problem of prime importance to the king and his ministers.

Machault d'Arnouville, controller-general in 1745, had brought in the "twentieth part" tax, which applied to all revenues without distinction, and went into a sinking fund destined to wipe out the public debt. It was a sound scheme fully approved by Louis XV; and it could have had excellent results. But it met with opposition from the privileged sections of Parliament, the clergy and municipal bodies. Machault's venture soon showed the impossibility of any hurried reform; it was a public scandal to exact the greater part of the taxes from the commons and exempt the wealthy classes.

Numerous decrees brought in extra revenue for the kingdom; and Parliament recorded them on the proposal of the minister of finance. But these taxes met with hostility from the magistrates, who, seeing the extent of their power, took great pleasure in haggling over their approval and openly flouting the king's authority.

As no new impost could be established without being recorded by Parliament, the latter made their usefulness felt by the king, and added to their own popularity by refusing to accept over-

Pondichéry, Chandernagore, Kharikal, Yanaon and Mahé.

A poor compensation for so many sacrifices, England gave up Martinique, Guadeloupe, Belle-Isle, Sainte-Lucie and Marie-Galante.

Louisiana was given to Spain, and our colonial empire melted away.

On the continent the king's ministers evacuated Hanover and Prussia; the port of Dunkerque was to be dismantled. The humiliation was almost theatrical; it could have been much greater if William Pitt had remained in power; Lord Bute, his successor, had no wish to push France to the end.

Must Louis XV be held responsible for the results of the Seven Years' War? I think not; a careful examination of documents and texts turns me from such a supposition.

Drawn by force of events into wars that he condemned, he tried to struggle against England and Prussia by an alliance with Russia and Austria; he had often mediocre generals who were jealous of one another, badly organized managements, short-sighted ministers, uninformed tactless functionaries; a growing lack of funds finally came to ruin his efforts and designs.

Within the country, Parliament, drawing-rooms and philosophers maintained a hostile atmosphere, and never ceased complaints against royal absolutism.

Men quite without foresight or humanity let the French heroes of Canada, India and Africa wear



ruptcy, reduced the national deficit and reached the heights of unpopularity. At the same time the chancellor, René-Nicolas Maupeou, succeeded in a daring and extraordinarily useful stroke. On this subject M. Louis Madelon wrote: "Driven to the limits in 1770 by a final conflict of the most serious nature with the Parliaments, Louis XV accepted and made his own a radical proposal from his chancellor Maupeou. One fine day the Parliaments were simply abolished, and the venal system of the courts of justice done away with. The magistrates being exiled and stripped of their offices, new courts were created of judges named by the king, and full advantage of the change was taken in a most reasonable reorganization of legal affairs — a reform much slandered — under the title of the "Maupeou Parliament," and so well thought out that twenty-five years afterwards the First Consul looked to its records for the beginnings of the modern judicial system." The abolition of Parliament roused public opinion, and there were partial risings in many of the provinces; writers inveighed against the king and Maupeou, but to no avail; Louis XV maintained his orders and did not yield an inch.

"If they came back," the king cried, "they would be just the same. They have stood in my way very often, and they thought it would be the same this time; but they made a mistake!"

Once deprived of the support of a conceited and unruly magistracy, many of the revolutionary elements calmed down; towards 1773 the horizon

heavy taxes. Thus, bound by such economic questions, Louis XV realized that he had all the insolence of the parliamentary officials against him; and he felt the power of a body which, far exceeding its original privileges, could cause a real riot in the streets of Paris. Nevertheless by imperious and peremptory actions he did his best to weaken men whose baneful tendencies he knew; sometimes acting with astonishing firmness.

Being Jansenist, Parliament was hostile to Jesuits and the greater part of the clergy; and there was nothing but odious petty quarrelling between adversaries equally irreconcilable and convinced. In 1753 the magistrates openly flouted the royal power; Louis XV and Machault exiled them, only to recall them almost at once.

Ten years later, in 1763, the king, in a magnificent speech before Parliament, clearly set out his powers and privileges; he condemned any diminution of his rights and rejected any attempts by parliamentary members at meddling in his councils and cabinet meetings.

If the king's words did impose a respectful silence their effect did not last long. The Seven Years' War demanded credits which only Parliament could meet; the Company of Jesus had to be sacrificed, and, exiled by Choiseul, be driven from the kingdom in a most iniquitous manner, drawing on it the sarcasm and ridicule of philosophers and men of letters.

Abbé Terray, financial administrator in 1769, tried a beneficial reform, warded off total bank-

With no official title he assumed in the course of twelve years the rôle of prime minister, introducing wise reforms, and pursuing an admirably constructive work. As minister of foreign affairs he negotiated the marriage between Louis XV's grandson and the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette, strengthened the union between France and Austria, united by the Family Pact the Bourbons of Spain, Naples, Parma and France; but he could not prevent the treaties of 1763.

His best piece of work was to be the enlargement of the kingdom. At Stanislas Leczinski's death the province of Lorraine reverted to the Crown. In 1768 Genoa sold Corsica to the king; and a campaign of pacification against Pascal Paoli, the leader of the insurrection, re-established order in the island after 1769.

Well-advised as to the importance of a powerful and well-equipped navy, Choiseul pushed ahead naval construction at a greater speed. A few years sufficed for him to endow his country with an excellent fleet capable of guarding the coasts, facing the English forces and giving valuable help to allies.

The re-establishment of the French navy, a project carried out with perseverance among countless difficulties, was one of the high-lights of his personal achievements. When he left Versailles Louis XV had, thanks to him, the disposal of sixty-four vessels of the line and fifty frigates.

From a military standpoint he had taken up a no less valuable and astonishingly modern line.

was cleared appreciably, and peace and tranquillity reigned a while; the kingdom owed these happy events to the monarch who governed it.

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The outstanding personality of the second half of Louis XV's reign was Etienne-François, Duc de Choiseul and d'Amboise; and between 1757 and 1770 this great minister did sterling service.

He had his master's full approbation, and received from him valuable tokens of friendship and confidence. He was vilified by all the writers and pamphleteers of the time, but a voluminous correspondence leaves no doubt as to his intelligence and his courage.

Holding the ministry for foreign affairs in 1758, he had shown exceptional talents and faithfully served France's interests; in recognition of these talents he was charged with the conduct of wars and of the navy; these offices he shared with his cousin the Duc de Choiseul-Praslin. But Mme de Pompadour's death came as a blow to his influence, for she had always tenderly fostered his brilliant career; and various conflicts brought him up against the Comtesse du Barry, who extorted from the king an order for his exile; it was an unjust order given in a moment of weakness, and one which could in no wise be justified in the eyes of the nation. However Choiseul took it philosophically, and lived till 1785 on his fine estate at Chanteloup, devoting himself to literature and the arts.

and Abbé Terray picking up the balls. Apart from this piece of pleasantry there are awful verses written against his Majesty, Chancellor Maupeou and Abbé Terray. And on Louis XV's statue has been found a most insulting inscription that respect prevents me from recording."

Each day added to the king's and his ministers' unpopularity; the most urgent decisions and those most beneficial to the general welfare met alike with a violent, inexorable and passionate hatred.

Songsters, slanderers and writers, unleashed their wit against the king's government with extraordinary bitterness; Choiseul's name was dragged in the mud and he was shown in the most unflattering light; Terray roused the verve of humorists, and like Maupeou was charged with every fault imaginable and drew upon his head the hatred of the people, the middle classes and the nobility. An absolute cloud of publications showered itself on the public, falsifying their judgment and their opinions. The first signs of the Revolution were appearing, and only a favorable moment was needed to raise a host of threatening storm-clouds. In December 1770 in Paris people were singing the couplet:

*Le Bien-Aimé de l'Almanach  
N'est pas le bien-aimé de France.*

A year later Bachaumont noted: "People are all saying at Paris that an abominable placard has been found on Louis XV's statue — one that has made the first good citizens who had the misfortune to read it shudder." It bore the words: "Notice from

The army under his orders became a more pliable instrument, and one that was more regular and more uniform in its organization and its aims. Training camps scattered throughout the kingdom increased the worth of soldiers and officers; the artillery was reorganized by Gribeauval. Louis XV, who took a keen interest in the problems of national defence, supported his minister's views. He watched with satisfaction method, discipline and clarity replace confusion and often disorder; he saw a rapid rise in the standard of technical knowledge, and the disappearance of favoritism before individual worth. Colonels could no longer appoint subordinate officers; these were designated by the king; thus scandalous abuses of privilege and bad or outworn practices were suppressed.

In foreign affairs, as well as in the conduct of the war and the naval ministries, Choiseul accomplished a huge and comprehensive task, whose benefits were to some extent to palliate the faults of Louis XVI's ministers, and check momentarily the dizzy fall into the abyss.

Reforms during Louis XV's reign, reforms embracing every aspect of administration, economics and politics, were the shining lights of a reign that gave France her present solidarity, and preserved her from all sorts of dangers, like out-of-date routine and traditions.

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Bachaumont wrote in his *Mémoires Secrets* in February 1770: "There is displayed everywhere a caricature representing the king playing billiards

pamphlet Louis XV's condemnation to the scaffold; already the throne itself was tottering, and unable to resist the relentless attacks led by writers, philosophers, magistrates, and a great part of the nobility and the bourgeoisie.

At the very time when king and ministers were working out in plan and practice a real modernisation of the internal supports of the country, when they were strengthening and increasing her army, navy, administration and finances, when they were facing courageously fearful problems, encyclopaedists and their clan, fallen members of parliament, utopians and wild dreamers were sapping the work, and destroying it as fast as it was realized.

Louis XV, Choiseul, Maupeou and Terray gathered nothing but blame and reproach; they felt themselves neither understood nor encouraged; and the world of society and intellectualism attacked them without respite.

However, the greater part by far of the kingdom remained loyal; it could conceive of no form of government outside the monarchy; it had a sound respect for the throne, feared revolution and insurrection, and asserted its devotion to the sovereign; the demands it formulated never attacked the régime.

For a long time the country escaped the influences of intellectual discontent; and for a long time it remained in ignorance of the theories that were destroying all the old principles of political, religious and moral authority.

the Mint. It is hereby ordered that a poorly struck Louis shall be struck again." In the same month an epitaph dedicated to Chancellor Maupeou was in circulation:

*Ci-gît Maupeou l'abominable,  
Ci-gît avec lui son esprit.  
Passant, ne crains point son semblable;  
Jamais monstre ne reproduit.*

When the minister's father died a new epitaph was composed:

*Ci-gît un vieux coquin qui mourut de colère  
D'avoir fait un coquin, plus coquin que son père.*

On the new Parliament established by Maupeou and Louis XV was retailed a most popular piece of satire:

*Quand je vois ce tas de vermine  
Que l'on érige en Parlement,  
Je les pendrais tous sur la mine,  
Disait le bourreau gravement;  
Mais, en vertu d'une sentence  
De ce conseil irrégulier  
Je ne pourrais, en conscience,  
Pendre même le chancelier.*

These few examples, selected from among many, show the railing spirit that animated the opposition. Never had so much slander and menace been poured on statesmen. Insolence passed all known limits; already could be discerned the distant roar of the succeeding reign, and already the pens were in the making that would demand in book and



## Chapter XII

### SADNESS AND BEREAVEMENT, MADAME DU BARRY, THE DEATH OF THE KING (1759—1774)

LOUIS XV's private life ended in sorrow, and its last act was melancholy; it was an act played in a brilliant setting amongst flattery and adulation, amongst grace and beauty and sensual pleasure.

As the years flew by, death struck pitilessly and heedlessly, isolating the king, robbing him of his best advisers, and creating an atmosphere of mourning and anguish. The wicked were spared, like Richelieu and Lebel; and temptation wormed its way into the king's heart and dominated a mind which was an easy victim to sensual delights. These last years knew no peace and serenity; they unrolled to a feverish restless tempo; they were surrounded by greed, ambition and bitter jealousies; there was for them no quiet or repose. Torn between love of family which led him towards his duty, and the adoration of a ravishingly beautiful mistress, between remorse, religion, the haunting fear of punishment after death, and a taste for worldly joys, Louis XV wavered like a feather in the wind. Since 1736 a ceaseless inner struggle tore him and tormented him, and filled with

## CHAPTER XI

M. Louis Madelin quotes Danton's words, saying: "The Republic existed in men's minds twenty years before its proclamation." Words that applied to certain quarters of Paris and certain provincial towns, not to the country as a whole. The changes suffered by the government were the doing of a daring, resolute and brave minority; Louis XV knew it, and feared the hostility of a few philosophers and magistrates more than popular risings or street disturbances.

At the end of his reign he had begun a great work of cleansing, and of reform and adaptation to future necessities; it was a work carried on against the interests of privileged bodies and out-of-date custom and routine; but it was a work necessary to combat the ferment of insurrection and lessen its violence.

Till his death Louis XV kept in check the disintegration which threatened the highest spheres of society and was gradually filtering in amongst the people. In 1774 it became an urgent matter to continue the task undertaken, without fault, hesitation or error. Now the new king, in ten years, accumulated every possible fault, hesitation and error; he dug his own grave and the monarchy's too; and he unconsciously participated in the destruction of the ideal whose guard and representative he was.

accepted church dogma, and cast no doubts upon the teachings of Rome; he detested deniers and unbelievers and wished to have nothing whatever to do with them; his piety and his faith showed absolute sincerity, and indeed increased in the years 1760—1770.

By reason of their incompatibility with his moral life Louis XV's Christian beliefs and practices are amazing; they are explicable, however, if one realizes that, for a Catholic, the first duty is to love God and believe in Him, and the second to submit to the laws of the Church.

Scrupulously insistent on attendance at Mass and the various services, and giving every manifestation of devout meditation, the king never doubted the existence of his Creator; he had always considered himself invested with a mission both human and divine, and felt that he must one day give an account of his life before the Supreme Judge. He had suffered much at not being able to approach the Penitents' bench or the Holy Table; and the gravity of his crimes appeared in its fullest extent.

Between the cynicism of a Richelieu and the moral tortures Louis XV endured there is a wide gap. Louis, bound to the despotism of his senses, was to tread a Calvary that was never suspected by the libertines of the time. His least illness sent him flying to priests and confessors, and awakened a deep feeling of repentance, turning his eyes towards Heaven and troubling his thoughts.

In these extraordinary returns we must not see merely a terror of death, but the expression of

misgivings the soul of a sinner conscious of his faults.

He was unable to take the sacraments, and his disobedience to the laws of the Church, and the Dauphin's and Princesses' sadness and the general realization of a scandal unworthy of him, took away from the king the happiness that he sought but never found. If Mme du Barry satisfied his sensual nature, surrounded him with delicacy and refinement, let him drink in the fragrance of youth and love, and gave a new spring to a being the years had disillusioned and who now was bowing before the blasts of autumn and winter, she never succeeded in driving away his gloom or the nightmare visions that haunted his keen and sensitive mind.

In the fascinating countess' arms, Louis XV knew moments of intoxication and forgetfulness; but then he would fall back into his own deep thoughts, dream of death and the beyond, fear the wrath of God and concern himself about his destiny after death. That concern never left him; he reflected with hope or with bitterness; he sought an answer in books, he gave himself up to experimental sciences and he sought the company of the Comte de Saint-Germain.

All that went beyond the limits of the material world filled him with passionate curiosity, everything touching on the great psychic problems absorbed his attention; the universality of his ideas was one with that of encyclopaedists and philosophers. The essential difference was that he

affairs, vision of the future, and truly admirable wisdom.

The signs of smallpox appeared, and Louis XV wrote three letters to inform Don Philip of the progress of the terrible malady. When all hope was gone the king wrote these lines, poignant in their simplicity: "Dear brother, cousin and son-in-law, just now you are in the gravest anxiety, and I for you, dear son, if I can still call you by that name. I promise to let you hear from me since I have no longer anyone to bear you news; my tears compel me to say no more."

On 24<sup>th</sup> December he wrote some consoling words to Don Philip who was prevented at the last moment from going to Versailles to see his wife before she died. "You would not have found her whom you sought; it is true you would have found a father bowed with grief and full of tenderness for you and your poor children. Oh, dear children, know that I will never forget my daughter in you; she is now happy, I hope, but we most unhappy in losing her, now especially! — I send you all my love; my eyes are filled with tears."

A man who could express so much grief could not be as selfish, hard and insincere, as Michelet, Sainte-Beuve and Lemontey took such delight in depicting him. This letter gives the lie to biassed and unfair judgments that are without a single particle of truth or psychological insight. A solemn service took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> February at the cathedral church of Notre-Dame; and on 27<sup>th</sup> of

sincere sentiments hitherto stifled by passions. Louis XV let his household guess nothing; he dissimulated their mystery.

Thus the complexity of a many-sided character asserted itself and developed in his riper years and in his old age. The tastes that were his as a child and a young man were found again at the close of his life. A contradictory mixture of strength, grandeur, nobility, piety, and also of weakness and fear, the Beloved, to be understood, demands delicate attention and fine psychological insight; otherwise he cannot be judged by Posterity.

The more one studies the memoirs, letters and stories of the time, the more one realizes the wide diversion of opinion about him; it is a variation explicable in view of the mystery that veiled his thoughts, and his instinctive dread of the curiosity of those who surrounded him.

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Anne-Henriette's death had cast a gloom over Louis XV; this unhappy event had renewed his sorrows in December 1759. For two years Marie-Louise-Elisabeth, called Mme Infante, had been living at Versailles trying to clear up her husband's affairs, and struggling courageously against adversity.

Ill, and at the end of her physical resistances, she sent her son Ferdinand a wonderful political and moral testament, full of valuable advice, luminous reflections and intelligent ideas; in it she displayed a perfect understanding of European

and the wholehearted kindness he displayed to all sufferings and misfortunes. Everyone foresaw a kindly reign and longed for its coming; reformers and devout prayed for it alike; and he united round his head promises as numerous as diverse.

So the announcement of a serious malady threatening the Dauphin's life roused heart-felt emotion throughout the country. Louis XV bore his sufferings with great strength of mind; he bowed before the Divine Will, restraining his tears, and consoled Marie-Josèphe, who was sunk in the depths of despair, and Marie Leczinska, and the princesses whose anguished countenances were painful to see. He followed the progress of the evil, tenderly examining his son, consulting doctors, and admiring the Dauphin's Christian humility, his resignation and his faith, as shown when he said to Adélaïde to allay her grief: "I cannot tell you how glad I am to be the first to go, I am sorry to be leaving you, but I am glad not to be remaining after you."

Through the slow twenty-four hours' agony the royal family was not allowed to be present; and they passed bitter hours waiting for the inevitable end.

Countless letters show how sincerely afflicted Louis XV was, and discount the idea of his indifference.

The sadness of the funeral ceremonies once passed, the king did all he could to surround Marie-Josèphe of Saxony with special love and friendship; he appreciated her exquisite sensitive

the following March a magnificent ceremonial was performed at the *Annunciata de Parme*.

Henceforth Adélaïde took the leading place; the loss of her two elder sisters gave her a new importance. Ambitious and self-willed, she tried to dominate Sophie and Victoire, took a hand in political affairs, loathed Choiseul, and wished to lead her father into the path of righteousness. All her efforts met with rebuffs; and she was unable to realize even one of her desires; Sophie and Victoire shook off her tutelage; Louis XV kept her from governmental questions, and Choiseul negotiated the marriage with Marie-Antoinette; she suffered a secret humiliation which was very painful to her imperious nature.

Five years passed between the death of the Infanta and her brother's death, which occurred at Fontainebleau on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1765. A fearful fatality hung about the heirs to the crown; once more the list of the sons of France who had descended prematurely to the grave was lengthened. From his union with Marie-Josèphe of Saxony the Dauphin had had one daughter and four sons: the Duc de Berry (the future Louis XVI), born in 1754; the Comte de Provence (the future Louis XVIII) in 1755; the Comte d'Artois (future Charles X) in 1757.

A faithful, attentive husband, who loved the joys and intimacies of family life, and of a mild reflective nature, he himself gave the kingdom the greatest hopes. Much was expected of this virtuous prince; and men praised the rectitude of his life



a scorbutic tumour; she grew thin and weak, incapable of the least exertion; she approached death in smiling resignation, and showed an amazing nobility of spirit. Her daughters kept close beside her, almost never leaving her, watching at the bedside of a mother they revered, and trying to show their heart-felt gratitude for all she had done for them.

Disturbed and anxious, Louis XV often entered the room where lay the woman he had so cruelly deceived. He would gaze at her calm face with its sweet serene lines, listen to her edifying words, and envy her candour and the rectitude of a kind and generous existence that had never been stained by sin or corruption.

On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1768 the queen of France was no more; she was leaving Versailles for ever, after bearing so long and so courageously the duties and the trials of a difficult situation. The day after her death the Duc de Cröy wrote:

"That princess who had done nothing but good deserved the nation's respect; the fineness of her character was stamped on her countenance, which was full of grace and charm." For several weeks the king displayed all signs of a sincere grief; but this grief was distracted by two things.

The first, quite unexpected, threw the princesses into a state of great consternation, and overwhelmed them with gloom; it was that Louis XV, no longer wishing to disguise his growing passion for Mme du Barry, made it quite obvious on all occasions, and himself proclaimed the reign of a

nature, delighted in her company, overwhelmed her with favours and attentions, and found in her the embodiment of virtues that he revered but never practised.

Although she never meddled in politics, the Dauphine wanted her eldest son to marry the princess Amélie, daughter of Frederick-Christian, Elector of Saxony. Reserve and discretion prevented her from formulating this wish so dear to her heart, or from expressing a desire which would have filled her with joy.

It seemed highly desirable to her that Clothilde and the Duc de Berry should marry members of her own family; she had misgivings about Choiseul's projects, and feared the Court of Vienna.

Nevertheless in 1766 when Louis XV asked her what she thought about the young Archduchess Marie-Antoinette coming to Versailles, she broke her long silence and advised against such a step, holding back negotiations for several months.

Attacked by the same evil as had carried off her husband, she died on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1767 leaving five children, and taking with her the unanimous regret of all who had come in contact with her; no princess was more lamented. Contemporaries sing her praises, telling of her virtues, her kindness, and the air of frankness and grace that emanated from her person. A few months later Stanislas Leczinski passed away; and a new wound opened in the queen's heart.

In November 1767 that sad heart failed a worn out body; Marie Leczinska began to suffer from

there was already stealing an anxiety roused by Mme Du Barry's influence. An enlightened woman, gifted with insight and foresight, Marie-Thérèse feared for her child the hostility of a mistress who held the king's entire confidence; and she foresaw painful clashes and conflicts.

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In November 1768 Mercy, the Viennese ambassador to France, wrote these lines: "The lady of Compiègne (Mme Du Barry) resides in the castle at the Court of the Fountains (as it is called), just beside the apartments where Mme de Pompadour used to live; she has a great number of servants dressed in magnificent livery; and at festivals and on Sundays she is to be seen at the king's Mass, in one of the ground-floor chapels that is reserved for her."

A little while later, the Austrian diplomat added further details about the future countess's privileges. "I heard," he confided to Kaunitz, "that she was beginning to give herself airs, that she talked about the government and the ministers, and the great services the State was rendered by a favorite capable of enlightening the king on the faults of the present administration; I heard, furthermore, that this woman expected to be publicly presented at Court, and that a subordinate faction, supported by some people of higher rank, was in favour of this project."

The Duc de Cröy committed to his Journal the hesitations that made him put off Mme Du Barry's

new mistress. The second thing, also unforeseen, was the project of a marriage between the Beloved and Archduchess Elisabeth, daughter of Marie-Thérèse, and Marie-Antoinette's sister. It was a fantastic project eagerly welcomed by Adélaïde and her sisters, who hoped to put an end to the career of an ambitious domineering favorite; a project accepted by the king, only to be rejected as impossible.

Joseph Ducreux, an artist in pastels, Maurice Quentin La Tour's pupil, was commissioned to go to Vienna to make a likeness of Elisabeth. He had also secret instructions bidding him paint Marie-Antoinette; that was the real object of his trip.

Choiseul, in his eagerness to hurry on the Archduchess's marriage with the Duc de Berry, wanted a good and faithful likeness; moreover he knew how vague the prospects of Louis XV's marriage were and did not dwell upon that.

The empress hurried on her daughter's departure, scarcely disguising a great satisfaction, and viewing with admiration the achievement of a task patiently and methodically persevered in since 1756. Marie-Antoinette's establishment on the throne of France seemed a gage of security and peace for Austria. Kaunitz', Starhemberg's and Mercy's designs were realized despite countless difficulties.

And man is powerless to foresee his destiny. Dark clouds hung over the future, a bloody future which would have turned to ice a tender affectionate mother's heart. Amidst her pleasant thoughts

Summer 1769 saw Mme Du Barry's triumph; she attended all the private suppers and festivities, and received the crowd of courtiers who came to pay their respects and to flatter and compliment her. In their hatred of Choiseul, who was blamed for the banishment of the Jesuits, the devout supported the favorite; round her person there formed a party closely linked with her fortune and determined to defend her against the machinations of her enemies. She had as confidantes the Duchesse de Valentinois and the Princesse de Montmorency; the Duc d'Aiguillon soon joined her, and frequented her salon most assiduously; the Duc de La Vallière followed his example.

Richelieu, Vauguyon the Dauphin's tutor, the Comtesse de Marsan, the Comte de Maillebois, the Broglie and numbers of others from illustrious families rallied to the support of Mme Du Barry. Having successfully won numerous allies, she welcomed to her rooms an elegant society that was eager to profit from her power.

Contemporaries describe the countess as a kind, good-natured, lively and vivacious woman, very fond of jewellery and adornments, and determined not to meddle in State affairs.

"She has great beauty" wrote the Duc de Cröy, "especially the lower half of her face, a manner that is very noble, easy, sweet and unpretentious; she is well made and has altogether the appearance of a good woman. She seems to be respectful towards other ladies; they say she is very gay, and she amuses the king."

official presentation from day to day: "What occupied Court and town during the months of December and January," he wrote, "was a much talked of presentation that was causing some misgivings. The most remarkable thing is that it was the libertines whose voices were loudest. Sensible men, who loved the king, prayed and kept silent. That was all they could do."

Jeanne Gomart de Vaubernier was of humble origin, with a doubtful past; after an adventurous youth she had become the mistress of Jean Du Barry, a man of no morals who was out to make money and grasp every opportunity. When Louis XV noticed the young woman's dazzling beauty, Jean Du Barry, with Richelieu's aid, set to work to foster a passion that might serve their common interests.

To make up for her plebeian birth, and wipe out, where possible, unpleasant memories, it was decided that Guillaume Du Barry, Jean's brother, should accommodate them and marry Jeanne Vaubernier, thus giving her a name belonging to the old nobility. Things happened secretly and as rapidly as could be desired, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1768.

Comtesse Du Barry, the pretty girl favoured by the king, had henceforth access to Versailles; she could meet persons of quality there and take her place with success; her husband soon disappeared, after being rewarded for his services.

After that nothing more remained but the inevitable presentation ceremony, which took place at seven o'clock on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

M. de Saint-Florentin, accustomed to this sort of mission, went to the Duc de Choiseul and told him to resign the ministries of War, Navy and Postal Affairs, and to leave Versailles within twenty-four hours for Chanteloup where he was to visit none but his near relations. A little while after, the Duc de Praslin, the cousin of the above, received a sealed letter inviting him to give up his offices on the spot; as he was ill he was given a week's respite.

Choiseul's exile seemed a grave step; on Louis XV's part it showed a weakness altogether unworthy of him, and proved a dangerous submission to Mme Du Barry's wishes; finally it deprived the kingdom of a capable and enlightened minister.

Of course it would be childish to attribute so signal a disgrace merely to the caprice of a favorite; its causes seem more involved; the opposition to the Choiseul party formed an imposing bloc that intrigued about the sovereign, employing every kind of calumny, and had with it the whole nation, and the members of the royal family.

If by exiling a valuable assistant the king was committing a fault and pandering to his mistress's desires, he was also obeying the urge of public opinion, the power of which was growing from day to day.



When he left Versailles for his fine estate of Chanteloup, Choiseul bore with him the esteem and gratitude of the best citizens; Marie-Antoinette's

The same impartial witness adds: "...Mme Du Barry's power increased even beyond the Marquise de Pompadour's most brilliant days. She had the appointment of all important positions; and there were situations for none but her protégés and admirers."

Well-informed and full of liveliness and wit, she added to the charms of youth and beauty the charm of an intelligent mind; and the new favorite strengthened in Louis XV's heart a growing passion, performing again the miracle performed by Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, the miracle of never wearying a fickle and inconstant man. She surrounded his old age with an intoxicating atmosphere of joy and pleasure, making him forget his bereavements and his anxieties.

Fond of literature, art and science, she could converse on many subjects, and did so with a good will that astonished the courtiers. The Louve-ciennes castle, crowded with famous works of art, became an idyllic retreat where the king loved to stay; it was enriched by the talent of all the best architects, painters and sculptors.

Choiseul regarded Mme Du Barry's ascension as Maurepas had regarded the Marquise de Pompadour's; doing his best to lay snares, and set a redoubtable barrier before the ambitions of a woman he loathed.

Two years passed in undercurrents of struggles and skirmishes; then on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1770 an unexpected and disconcerting dénouement took place.



me, and I love him dearly; but it is a pity to see his weakness for Mme Du Barry who is the stupidest and most impertinent creature imaginable. She played with us at Marly every evening; twice she happened to be beside me, but she did not speak to me, and I naturally did not attempt to begin a conversation with her; still, when I had to, I spoke to her. My dear husband has changed a lot, and it is much to his advantage. He shows a great affection for me, and is even beginning to give me some confidence."

Till Louis XV's death Marie-Antoinette's attitude scarcely changed; she loved the king sincerely and showed it time and again; she realized her husband's merits, and felt a violent repulsion towards Mme Du Barry, which she found it difficult to suppress, in spite of the advice and counsel of her mother who preached patience, tact, kindness and gentleness. She had scarcely been installed at Versailles before she made friends and enemies; for she held a place where every gesture she made and every word she spoke was commented on and often distorted.

Louis XV admired her fresh beauty and her vivacity and charm; he seems however to have discerned her faults and suffered at her suspicion and hostility towards the Comtesse Du Barry. Besides, no real intimacy existed between the king and the Dauphin; their characters were entirely different and had no point of contact; they professed theories that were diametrically opposite.

Devout, hard-working and full of virtue and

marriage with the Duc de Berry, celebrated amidst feasting and rejoicings in May 1770, was largely his work and the result of his diplomacy.

This marriage was the answer to Louis XV's prayers, brightened the future and took place under the most auspicious conditions. The pomp and lavish splendour of the ceremonies which accompanied its various episodes have been described by contemporaries. Suppers, balls, concerts, theatres, illuminations — everything was done as befitted the heir to the throne. For many long years Versailles had not known such animation; faces beamed with joy; sincere happiness enveloped the young people; and no shadow seemed to creep into this radiant atmosphere.

But on 30th May a sad event clouded their brows; about nine o'clock, when the Parisian populace was gazing at the illuminations in honour of the Dauphin and his wife at the corner of the Rue Royale, there was a terrible accident and a hundred and thirty-two dead bodies were cast in indescribable confusion on the roadway.

It was a first note of tragedy, and a first ill omen that seized on Marie-Antoinette's imagination, and filled her with grief and horror. She returned to Versailles in fear and trembling, haunted by a nightmare vision whose recollection could never be wiped out.

On 9th July she wrote the empress a letter revealing her feelings, a valuable letter that throws a bright light on her first impulsive impressions.

"....The king has been very kind indeed to

insight that never deceived him, gave them advice and concerned himself with their education.

Already the Comte d'Artois was showing the signs of a merry, wayward and impulsive nature. When he was learning geography he asked how Louis XV had acquired the Franche-Comté; "By right of conquest," replied his master. An hour later at table the Dauphin was given a very fine peach, and, as he was talking at the time to the Comte de Provence, he left it on his plate; the Comte d'Artois, who had none, took it and took a bite out of it, scandalizing the Dauphin. His under-tutor said to him: "Sir, that peach is not yours."

"Pardon me, Sir, it is mine by right of conquest!"

The presence of these lively young people made Versailles gayer, and Louis XV encouraged their amusements and games.

In the course of the visit paid him in October 1768 by Christian XII of Denmark, he confided to the foreign king these melancholy words: "I have suffered great losses; my son the Dauphin, his wife, the queen, my elder daughters; I am growing old, and at my age I could be the father of half my subjects; in my love for them I am father of them all."

The Comte de Provence's and the Comte d'Artois' marriages, a few years apart, served as an excuse for a lavishly sumptuous display, and rekindled a flame whose brilliance was dying down.

precocious wisdom, like his father the Duc de Berry sought a calm tranquil life quite apart from worldly pleasures, and he feared to appear in public; his manners were clumsy, ponderous and artificial, with no spontaneity or affability. Being timorous and fearful, and hampered by poor eyesight, he shunned official receptions, had no idea how to perform the duties of his rank, replied abruptly to compliments, and altogether often seemed harsh and imperious.

He was the antithesis of Louis XV; just as the latter was graceful and diplomatic, and showed his nobility and majesty in his bearing, so the Dauphin was clumsy, nervous and awkward.

Nevertheless, hunting and taste for handicrafts brought them together on many occasions.

The Marquis de Valfons in his *Journal* recalls several stories about the heir to the throne.

"One day," he wrote, "when he was hunting with his brothers, the stag took to the water; the Comte d'Artois shouted eagerly to take it by the shortest route; the coachman rushed to do his bidding across a field full of grain; the Dauphin, coming to the coach-door, ordered the coachman to go right round so as to save the crop; and this vexed the Comte d'Artois very much."

"Brother," the Dauphin said to him, "have you enough money to pay the owner of the field for the loss we would cause him? One mustn't destroy what is so hard to come by."

Louis XV took an interest in the development of his three grandsons; he studied them with keen

inexhaustible charity and an avoidance of pleasures and amusements.

Mme Du Barry's presence near the king filled her heart with grief and bitterness; she prayed unceasingly for the salvation of a dearly loved and admired father, asking Heaven the remission of his sins, and trying by her own virtues to atone for the king's misconduct. After many hesitations and much consultation with her confessor, Abbé du Terney, she resolved to enter a Carmelite convent to give herself entirely to God; and she did not confide this plan to anyone; Marie Leczinska and her sisters were unaware of it.

Only Louis XV learned of it from the lips of M. de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, the princess's confidant, who had been charged with this mission; for she herself did not dare undertake so grave a step.

Mastering his emotions with difficulty, the monarch promised an answer in a fortnight. After minutely weighing the reasons which determined his daughter's vocation, and considering the effect of harsh monastic discipline on a girl of delicate health, accustomed to the comforts of Versailles, and realizing the imperious character of a divine call, he finally assented, and in February 1770 wrote the following letter:

"Your Grace, my dear daughter, who has given me an account of all your information and advice, will surely have recounted also all that I said in reply. If it is for God alone, I can offer no opposition to her wishes or your decision . . . . You

Bachaumont noted in his *Memoirs* on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1769: "It is known that the king, a friend of all arts, and initiated in the loftiest speculations, from Saint-Hubert observed the transit of Venus across the sun. The Comtesse Du Barry accompanied His Majesty on this expedition, and the king deigned to inform this lady on a few elements of astronomy so as to make the phenomenon interesting to her."

Between 1768 and 1774 Louis XV showed extraordinary activity; not only did he work at state affairs, now more difficult than ever, but he protected art, literature and science, kept up with all new inventions, enriched his mind with all sorts of information, and wrote numerous letters whose interest is of the first order. He sent excellent advice to Mme Infante's son, showing rare perspicacity and a curious intuition about the future.

Time and experience had ripened his judgment; from each of his letters there shines Christian philosophy blended with enlightened diplomacy. That correspondence makes up Louis XV's political testament, and reveals the diversity of his views, the profundity of his thought, and the perfect balance of a mind now at the end of a long life.

\*

Louise, whose youthful charms and graces had been painted by Jean-Marc Nattier, inherited from her mother a sincere and ardent piety; she spent long hours deep in meditation, and showed an

Proyart, in the book dedicated to Louise, told of this interview: "Louis XV," he wrote, "stayed three quarters of an hour with his daughter; he then went to see her cell and knelt down on the straw-mattress. The princess asked him to sit down, which he did; at about a quarter to seven he went out by her sitting-room; the door being closed he had the grill opened and said to all the lords, "Look at Louise; there she is!"

After that Sister Thérèse of Saint-Augustin received a visit from the princesses Adélaïde, Victoire, Sophie, Marie-Antoinette and Elisabeth.

On 10th September 1770 there was a ceremony at the Basilica of Saint-Denis for the taking of the veil. In a fine sermon the Archbishop de Troyes lauded Louise's virtues; while she, clad in the cloak of Sainte-Thérèse, appeared radiantly happy.

Between 1770 and 1774 she made many an effort to bring the king back to the discipline of the Church, and to secure the re-establishment of the Jesuits.

She became mistress of the novices on 1st October 1771, and in November 1773 prioress of her convent.

With the desire for peace and humility that had brought her into the keeping of the Carmelites soon were mingled preoccupations for the affairs of the kingdom and of religion. These were preoccupations that involved a lot and led to a correspondence with some of the ministers, troubling the peace of a soul that sought above all what was good and right.

will be able to speak of it to your sisters when you judge it a suitable occasion . . . . I have before this made forced sacrifices; this will be a voluntary one on my part. God grant you strength to maintain your new state; for once the step is taken, there is no return. I send you all my love, and give you my blessing. Louis."

On 6th April 1770 he wrote Louise an official consent. Accompanied by a few people she entered the Carmelite convent of Saint-Denis and knelt before the abbess and the nuns with these touching words: "I beg you all to have the charity to receive me among you, to regard me as your sister, to forget all that I have been in the world, and to pray to God for the king and for me: I desire with all my heart to be a Carmelite, and I will try with God's grace and the help of your prayers to be a good Carmelite."

Under the name of Sister Thérèse of Saint-Augustin, the novice shut herself in the silence and peace of the cloister, while Court and city commented on such an amazing decision. Louis XV seems to have understood his so dearly loved child's aspirations; though himself incapable of renouncing the flesh, he revered the religious life and admired spontaneous sacrifice.

On the afternoon of Thursday 3rd May 1770, he paid a visit to the new Carmelite. When Prince Beauveau, captain of his guard, showed signs of accompanying him within the convent, he said: "You can wait for me here without anxiety: the Carmelites will guard me well."



warned of the danger of alarming the sick man by his presence, the uselessness of giving him the last sacraments, and the physical reaction that such a step could rouse.

The perspicacious prelate had discerned how hostile the atmosphere was towards him, and how the memory of what happened at Metz was occupying everyone's mind and imagination. He returned to Paris and the next day, listening only to his conscience, he came and established himself near the king's room, prepared to brave the plots and hatred that were sure to descend upon him. These plots and hatred, however, were to die down for other reasons; Bordeu, the Comtesse Du Barry's doctor, understanding the precise nature of this equivocal position, said to her on the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> May: "Madame, the king is in great danger, the people are murmuring, and if death takes him before he can receive the sacraments, I cannot answer for your life."

Mme Du Barry wept, and after a little consideration went down to the king and said in a lively voice: "What do you think of the pious souls who want you to receive the sacraments just when you are beginning to get better? I advise you to do what they ask. I shall leave you for a while, and come back and see you in a few days." Louis XV, though surprised, approved; he wanted however to spare the lady he still loved the humiliations suffered by Mme de Châteauroux and to lessen what he knew must be the sadness of her departure.

Sending word to the Duc d'Aiguillon, he put

At about seven in the morning of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April Louis XV had violent attacks of pain accompanied by vomiting and severe headaches. As he was at Trianon he did not wish to alarm his household by a sudden return, and courageously endured the bouts of fever that assailed him all the morning.

At midday everyone noticed the change of his appearance; he himself seemed uneasy; still, the courtiers postponed his departure for Versailles till six o'clock, hoping for some improvement in his condition.

The path from Trianon to the palace was covered in three minutes. Supported by two of his friends, he painfully reached his room; two bleedings and a strong dose of emetic gave him some relief; but between eleven and twelve that night the smallpox rash appeared. The days of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> May saw the relentless development of the malady.

Conscious of the danger threatening him, Louis XV several times asked for a priest; Mme Du Barry's friends in their fear and alarm wanted to keep the king isolated; for they were afraid of him repenting sincerely, and the price of that would have been immediate disgrace for them.

Soon the question of the Sacrament became supremely important; and the whole kingdom followed with curiosity the phases of a struggle between such opposite interests.

For the first time the Archbishop of Paris went off to Versailles in the hope of bringing back the sovereign to his religious duties. He had been

for the scandal he has brought his people; so that, if God grants him a renewal of health, he will devote himself to a life of penitence and the support of religion and the relief of his people's sufferings."

A silence greeted these words; overcoming his weakness the king added: "I would have liked to have had the strength to say it myself." Then he whispered to Adélaïde who was beside him: "I don't feel any better or any calmer."

The Duc de Cröy notes in his Journal: "Louis XV during his illness has shown a courage both heroic and simple, gentle and unassuming. Now at last is perfect Christian resignation joined to calm and tranquillity, and all that indicates nobility of soul."

He retained consciousness, and patiently accepted the torments and sufferings of his malady, offering them up in remission of his faults.

On 9th, between eleven and twelve at night, the king was given extreme unction; and there was no hope left in the hearts of the princesses, who had watched by their father's bedside with an endurance and disregard of infection and a heroism really deserving of the greatest praise.

Round the barred gates of Versailles there pressed a crowd of curious sight-seers, hoping for news and commenting on the day's happenings; no regret, no sympathy and no compassion accompanied the last hours of the Beloved.

In the churches no-one attended the forty hours of prayer; everyone was totally indifferent to the passing of Louis XV; there was even some undis-

the Comtesse Du Barry in his care, and bade him surround her with every imaginable attention. She left Versailles at half past three to go to Rueil, an estate belonging to the Aiguillon family; and from there she followed the last moments of him who had endowed her with every earthly pleasure, and led her on the path of sin.

Since 1736 Louis XV had not taken the Sacraments, though he was scrupulous in his observance of fast days.

Cardinal de La Roche-Aymon, the Grand Almoner, came to bend over his bedside and receive the expression of a deep repentance.

The king had frequent conversations with Abbé Maudoux, his regular confessor, a man of admirable piety and astonishing zeal. On 7<sup>th</sup> May at three in the morning, Louis XV made his confession; the communion was administered at seven o'clock by the Grand Almoner. At the end of the ceremony his lips murmured simply: "At last, I am happy."

Finding new strength he spoke with the Duc d'Aiguillon, asking him to send word to the princesses and waken his grandchildren, so that he might be surrounded by all the royal family in the dark hours through which he was passing.

After receiving the viaticum in deep humility and contrition, Louis XV said a few words to the cardinal; the latter went to the door and addressing those present announced in a loud clear voice:

"Sirs, the king bids me tell you that he asks God's pardon for having sinned against Him, and

When Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette mounted their coach they were greeted with cheers. Cries of "Long live the King!" re-echoed, right to the chamber where the monks slowly told their beads for the repose of the dead prince.



In picking up the principal threads of a reign that ended amid blame and criticism, Abbé de Véry writes: "Learned men are in the habit of designating Louis XV's times as the peak period of the monarchy. That is not my view; I regard Louis XV's reign as the happiest period of our history.

"France has never been so rich nor abounding in so many forms of industry, so well endowed with learned men; her country-side has never been so well cultivated or so well peopled as in the reign of Louis XV. His armies were not so brilliant, I admit; but neither did they entail the injustice, odiousness or devastation of his predecessor. There was no civil war to shed his citizens' blood, nor did any religious cause put them at the mercy of the executioner for fifty-nine years. No period of the monarchy has given us so long a peace. And in that same period the three foreign wars did not bring hostile armies within our frontiers. The only way in which the people suffered for them was the lives of some of their soldiers and the money to support the wars.

guised rejoicing, and the hopes of a better reign. At eleven o'clock on 10th May the end was near, and he died at a quarter past three.

Scarcely had Louis XV drawn his last breath when the Duc de Bouillon, the Lord High Chamberlain, went out of the royal apartment and, advancing to the barrier which divided the Oeil-de-Boeuf in two, cried out: "Sirs, the king is dead!" The usher added, "Pass on, Sirs!" and the rooms slowly emptied.

\*

The king of France was laid out on a bier lit by the flickering light of candles, watched over by priests and nuns; to dispel the fearful odour that filled the room the windows were open, stifled sounds recalling echoes from everyday life, and gusts of pure air wafting in from the park. A few yards from this room where death reigned gardens were gay with bright flowers amid green lawns, birds sang in the great trees and a faint breeze formed a rainbow in the spray of a sparkling fountain where bronze nymphs and laughing Cupids bathed in its waters.

Outside was the glad intoxication of re-birth; the earth quivered with joy, and spring lent happy colours to nature and humanity.

Inside the palace, the man who had such a love for nature, for rides in wood and countryside, for the joys of love, lay cold and lifeless.

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## CHAPTER XII

Another blessing that this reign brought was the security of roads and towns."

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